

SAMPAN AT DAWN

A Man in the East

A Journey through French Indo-China



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Foreword



Obviously, I had to have *some* excuse for going on this journey ; the reader who manages to reach the end of the first chapter will discover what it was. On the other hand I, like everyone else, had no excuse whatever for writing a book ; but having, like nearly everyone else, decided to write one, it was necessary to search with the utmost diligence for a Theme. This Theme is apparent in the sub-title at least, and lest it should be deemed to be equally apparent in the book itself, I hasten to issue the following warning.

Less than half of the text is directly about Indo-China ; a description of big-game hunting in a remote jungle occupies more than half of the part that is. He, therefore, who wishes to learn anything worth knowing about that country would do well to return the book unread to the bookseller, the library, or the lender, as the case may be.

If, having obtained the book, he decides willy-nilly to read it, he may glean some hint of its contents from the headings to Parts I and III. So far as I have been presumptuous enough to discuss the war between

China and Japan, I have tried where possible to do so from a French angle, and thus partly to redeem an otherwise unjustifiable departure from what might conceivably be called a unilateral artistic purpose.

M. R.

P A R T I



The Back Door to China

CHAPTER ONE

DOUBLE EVENT



I wrote, at the top of this chapter, Appendix. Then it occurred to me that for the opening words of a book this was perhaps not the happiest of titles ; and so, as the observant reader will have noticed, I changed it.

Not, however, without misgiving. For the events chronicled herein really do begin with an appendix. With, in point of fact, my own. And they begin in Shanghai on the day when, resembling in this if in no other respect a girl going to her first dance, it was about to come out. At least, they might as well begin there as anywhere else ; and the occasion seems appropriate because, had the appendix not come out when it did, this book would have been totally different : it might not have been written at all. (It will be shown, I daresay, that in avoiding the latter alternative I missed a big opportunity.) I had, in short, been in Shanghai for three days, and according to plan I should have left it within as many more.

According to plan. What plan ? Perhaps, after all, I had better go back a little further.

It was now the end of October. Two months ago I had been in Tientsin. Even in the coolest shade the thermometer, I remembered, had hovered uncertainly between ninety-nine and a hundred degrees Fahrenheit.

Not even the importunate flies could achieve the energy to do anything more strenuous than crawl. My bare, saturated arm, resting on a ledger, came away tattooed with debit entries ; precipitated sweat invested the page with latent sponge-like attributes, so that any attempt to write on it was met with a resistance akin to that of blotting-paper or flannel. Chinese clerks, indigenous to such a climate, regarded with an air of tolerant cynicism my attempts to remain dry and appear comfortable in a temperature to which the colour of my skin was so patently not adapted.

I swore. I cursed my luck. I wallowed in self-pity. By trade a chartered accountant, I was performing the duties of the most boring profession in the world, in the world's foulest city, and in a temperature wherein the only appropriate action was to lie all day in a cold bath.

I flung down my pen, resigned myself to introspection and thoughts of my past and future. Two years before, tired of London, impatient with successive jobs on newspapers and in offices whose heads were so impervious to my genius that I left, I had resolved to Go Out East. Contracting to spend there five years, I now found myself incorrigibly bored after two. Coming to a sudden decision, I went boldly and incontinently to my firm. China, I asserted with confidence, was no place for me ; since the Japanese invasion, I continued, it was no place for any foreigner to settle in permanently. Had I not a Future to provide for ?

With reluctance but without reservation, my firm

agreed. To their eternal credit, they gave me my passage-money home ; and I had managed to save a little more.

It was thus that in October I had gone south to Shanghai. It was thus that I found myself, thirsty for adventure, waiting to sail to the Philippine Islands in a yawl of eighteen tons, with some vague idea of subsequently touring the South Seas.

This, then, was my plan. But the yacht was to leave in three days, and I had acute appendicitis. It was bad luck. Or so I thought at the time. I felt resentful and, the master of my fate, yet still a helpless victim of circumstance as I strove with my will against the sickly fumes of the anaesthetic, inexorably shutting me out from the world of men and machines. . . .

.

I was at the helm of the yacht. Far away to windward the coast of Formosa cut a faint silhouette against the tropic sky. It was very warm and I dived overboard for a swim. I was yards away ; the yacht had heaved to. "Look out !" they cried. "Swim like hell." I saw the long black shape sliding towards me, its massive jaws gaping wide. I raced for the yacht. I had never swum at this speed before. I was on board. . . . I was safe. . . . But no—it had managed to get its teeth into my stomach. The shark was wrenching with all its might at my entrails. I was dying, dying the slow and terrible death of a soldier who has stopped a shell splinter with his belly. . . .

"It's all right," said the nurse, a dim white,

comforting shape. "You're back in your room now. It's all over. How do you feel?"

I swore at her. I used words which nobody, not those for whom the Old School Tie is the most vicarious of symbols, has ever dreamt of using in front of women. I did not mind. For once I was completely unrepressed. To a practising acolyte of Freud I would have been the perfect patient.

For the next three days I gazed out of the window at a skyscraper under the firm impression it was a mountain, tried (in vain) to lie on my side, and fell in love with the night nurse, so pretended I could not sleep. The surgeon, a cheerful but laconic Scot, asked me how I felt. "Awful," I told him. "Splendid," he said, and vanished. I exchanged facetious notes with the man, unseen, in the next room. I got up after six days and spent a week at the house of a friend. The yacht, in the meantime, had departed.

Recovering rapidly, I left my friend's house and went to an hotel. My plans had been upset and I wanted to be alone to think. It was the middle of November. Physical weakness, lack of the remotest form of anchorage in this vast city, diminishing funds, and a faint nostalgia, all combined to urge me to get home by Christmas. I hankered for old friends, pasteurized milk, theatres, music at first hand, and all those manifold indefinable benefits, offspring of the marriage of an old and theoretically progressive civilization with an income tax of five-and-sixpence in the pound. I saw myself enjoying the comforting stability of a London office-stool, strap-hanging in tube trains, and

waiting in the Sunday-morning queue to drive off from the first tee. It was all very tempting ; and if perhaps the people at home were as a whole too busy trying to do what prejudice, rather than logic or ethics, prompted them was their duty, if perhaps they did not seem to have enough fun, that was at least no more of an evil than affairs in the East, where the foreigners had too much. Life, this side of Heaven or Utopia, is nowhere perfect.

But I was assailed, too, by another thought, which I quickly banished. This security, this old unwithered beauty that was England, had of late been rudely threatened. It had been forced to the very edge of a precipice called War. Even now it had not been borne back far ; nobody really knew that it would not soon be forced to that edge again, and not only to the edge but down into the bottomless pit below. But no good, I knew, could come from brooding on that. Ignore it. Perish the thought.

However, I did not want to go home just yet. I had a book to write, and nothing to write it about. I had booked a passage on a large and swift steamer, which I promptly cancelled. Instead of going home I danced the Lambeth Walk (which had recently invaded a hundred of Shanghai's night clubs), made a number of new friendships and cemented a few old ones, and generally painted the International Settlement a very vivid colour indeed. I began to feel stronger.

It was just at this time that there occurred two events which proved, for me, decisive. The first was the fall, almost simultaneous, of both Hankow and Canton into Japanese hands. Long expected, the actual

surrender savoured of anti-climax ; but the fact was not without interest in that Canton had been China's sole remaining outlet to the sea. Henceforth her only exits to the outside world, from her present capital at Chungking, lay west through Burma, south through French Indo-China, or north through turbulent and not easily accessible Turkestan and thence to Russia. From one or more of these sources she must receive her munitions, her medical supplies, even some of her food, and along one or more of these routes must she exchange such goods as she was still able to trade in on a competitive scale. In the past few days, despite repeated official French denials, rumours had reached Shanghai of an unprecedented shipping boom, due to arms traffic, in French Indo-China. Russia for some time had openly supplied China with such arms and munitions as she could afford. Great Britain, unlike France, had not assured Japan of any restrictions placed on traffic through Burma. Moreover, a railway ran, or was alleged to run, from Hanoi, capital of French Indo-China, to Yunnanfu, capital of Yunnan province in China proper. Yunnanfu was a picturesque city, and the province the most remote and interesting in the country. My die, I could see, was beginning to be cast.

The other event occurred when, at a party, I met Frederico. I had met him, as a matter of fact, several times before, in Peking. Secretary to the Brazilian Legation there, he had attracted my notice by his singular prowess at polo, his immaculate theatrical attire—in which a monocle played the lead—and the

fact that of all the jobs in the world in which the protagonist has little to do his, by the sheer aridness of its field, came out a winner by several lengths. Think of it. To start with, nobody in Peking works at all. It is the remotest backwater in the world. Add to this the fact that the Chinese government was not in Peking but miles away in Chungking, that on no conceivable grounds could the Chinese and Brazilian governments have had anything to say to one another anyway, and that apart from the Ambassador, a superannuated actress, and Frederico himself, no Brazilian had ever been near Peking for years, and you may cease to wonder (if you have wondered at all) why he spent his entire time dressed in riding-breeches or tennis flannels or dancing on the roof of the Grand Hôtel de Pékin. He was in Shanghai, ironically enough, on leave.

"I'm going to Indo-China," he told me in a quaint accent that I found attractive. "Come with me and shoot elephants."

Now, except on the rifle-range at school, I had barely handled a gun in my life; though I must confess to having felled a sparrow, in a remote past, with an air-gun. But somehow an elephant seemed, and indeed was, enormous. (It did not occur to me that its area of mortality from a bullet wound was decidedly smaller. I discovered that afterwards.) I was full of whisky and courage. Frederico did so loathe the idea of going alone. I had practically decided to go to Indo-China anyway. What could I say?

"All right," I told him. "I'll come. When do we start?"

QUICK CHANGE

The next two days supplied complex bogies in the shape of Argument and Debate. For my part, any indulgence in big-game hunting was to be purely incidental to a trip to Indo-China, the main purpose of which was to visit Yunnanfu. Frederico refused to consider going to Yunnanfu or anywhere near it. He wanted to spend another week in Shanghai ; I did not. It was some time before we solved the problem by the simple expedient of booking passages for Indo-China on different dates. While Frederico danced in Shanghai, I was to seek a trip on the alleged railway to Yunnanfu. Our common ground was Haiphong, the northern port of Indo-China, and it was there that we arranged to meet on my return. Together, we would proceed south from Haiphong to Saigon, in search of elephants and tigers. He was to bring Margot.

I had better explain Margot. She lived with her French father and American mother in Peking. She worked on an English newspaper there, and for some time she had been either engaged to, or not engaged to, Frederico ; a charming but vague person, she was never quite sure which. The point was that she wanted adventure ; she wanted journalistic

“copy”; she wanted—I knew it—to go with us to the jungle.

Now I regard women as a sex as being both adorable and necessary, in most places. But not in jungles. In jungles, as (hypothetically) in men’s changing-rooms, they are a menace, a pretext for clothing and a restraint on the emission both of feelings and of wind. Repressions are caused not so much by frustrated sex desires as by the rigorous conventions of a society designed to accommodate men and women together on equal terms. Remove one or the other of the sexes, and the conventions, and therefore the repressions, are removed as well. Precious few places to-day, outside a monastery, are reserved for men; jungles, in my opinion, should be committed to the charge of an International Trust for the Preservation of Wide Open Spaces. For if not, where else, but to the bottom of the sea, can man go to Forget?

Of Margot’s urge, therefore, I was afraid. But I was also prepared for it. I raised my hands in deprecating but only faintly simulated horror (my histrionic powers are deplorable). I told her tall improvised stories of scorpions, snakes, man-eating tigers, and the varied insidious fevers which abounded and, I said, almost always stretched their victims upon the rack of a lingering death. I looked pointedly at her long, thick hair. “Jungles,” I added, “are infested with bats.”

But Margot, alas, was made of sterner stuff, and with more courage, perhaps, than discretion, she remained insistent. Upon my obstinate English ways she poured a Gallic scorn. She accused me of prejudice,

of unsociability, even, with imaginative feminine irrelevance, of pederastic tendencies. What was good or bad enough for us was no worse or better for her. And so on. She tried cajolery, vampire methods ; she sought to pierce my resistance with all the appealing shafts from her sexual armoury.

Shaken but determined, I replied with the sophistries of a vanishing temper, with unavailing and stentorian shouts. Raising her own voice, she proved more than a match for this. Hot words were bandied in the silent and public precincts of Shanghai's most respectable hotel. Frederico stood by, a bewildered, ineffectual arbitrator, like the League of Nations. Deadlock, unoriginal, ensued. Compromise was eventually reached in a pact briefly outlined as follows. She was to come as far as headquarters, wherever they were, provided that she remained there throughout the expedition. She was not to be disarming, in a feminine way, and she herself was to be disarmed. She was to sew and wash clothes and do what she was told ; and she was to provide all the iodine, mosquito lotion, and other pharmaceutical aids that we might consider necessary. Like all women, she had got her own way. Like most men, I gave way in the hope that, again like all women, she would change her mind.

With this arrangement and some misgivings, I packed a few bags, sent home two trunks, and left them.

My ship, a small coastal vessel, lay alongside the famous Bund, lined with its skyscrapers looking like



pale immense ghosts in the morning mist. Cruisers of the British, American, French, and Italian fleets were moored in imposing array before the façade of this most cosmopolitan of cities. Multitudes of junks and sampans steered a perilous course through the narrow channels between passing steamers. Coolies chanted as they unloaded cargo.

The wharves were busy. Since the war began in August 1937 the fifth biggest city in the world had enjoyed the added distinction of being entirely inaccessible by road, rail, river, or air. To anyone but the Japanese—who had by this time, for their exclusive use, got the Nanking railway working again—Shanghai had to be reached by sea. You could not get away from it except by sea. Those of its inhabitants whom a tendency to suffer from *mal de mer* compelled to stay on *terra firma* were obliged to face the alternative qualms of claustrophobia.

We detached ourselves, without fuss, from the quay, slid gently down the Wangpoo into the wide filthy Yangtse, and passing innumerable small islands, bare rocks, steamed down the China coast. My journey had begun.

Nothing happened for two days. My fellow-passengers bored me ; I have no doubt I bored them. The sea, not rough, looked none the less unsuited to navigation by an 18-ton yacht. I praised my recalcitrant appendix and wondered idly how that vessel—I mean the yacht—was faring.

On the third day we called at Swatow. This is a smallish port on the coast of Kwangtung province, a

few hundred miles east of Canton. If it is remarkable at all—which it is not—it is for its oranges and lace ; it has no communications with the interior and is therefore strategically useless ; but it had achieved, at that time, the ephemeral distinction of being almost the only port on the coast, east of Canton, which was still in Chinese hands. I went ashore with a fellow-passenger, a Melbourne journalist.

Whitewashed walls on the river-front presented an almost blinding aspect in the tropical glare. The streets of Swatow alternate between wide avenues, lined with acacia trees, and tiny narrow alleys containing market-stalls whose wares, on one side of the street, seem inextricably confused with those on the other. Here, as elsewhere in China, the more ambitious shopkeepers give their academies English—or nearly English—names. Ho Ping Pong & Co., Limited Provider. Canadian Tailors Co-operation. Mei Ling Day and Night Couple Photographer. New Living Hairdresser. The photographer is called after Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, the hairdresser after the New Life Movement started by her husband. (One of the first items on its agenda was to clean up the barbers' shops.) These ambitious shop-titles are a little difficult to reconcile with the practical results of ambition, since nobody in Swatow speaks, and I doubt if anyone understands, English. Perhaps the titles are a tribute to a nation of shopkeepers, in much the same way as the incomprehensible French menus to an English meal acknowledge the Gallic supremacy as gourmets.

About half the shops were closed, and about half the

town's normal population were living in, and on, the country at the time. This did not surprise me. In view of Japanese air-raids, recurring at intervals rarely exceeding a week, the place could perhaps be forgiven for its failure to maintain attraction as a residential district.

Air-raid precautions, as practised in Swatow, owe nothing to Western influence. Backed only by a few hundred old rifles and about a dozen machine-guns, its call to peace favours a policy less of resistance to aggression than of disarmament. It eschews, because it cannot obtain, the anti-aircraft gun ; it has no aeroplanes ; barrage balloons, shelters, and trenches would seem to present possible means of defence against air attack not hitherto considered, or at any rate not employed, by the Chinese inhabitants of Swatow.

Are they, then, without A.R.P. devices at all ?

They are not. They have achieved protection of a kind at once cheap, attractive to the eye, and, in a double sense, efficacious. Normally, the Chinese screen their buildings from the sun's rays by awnings of mat spread on scaffolds. In Swatow—and formerly in Canton—these had been replaced by a kind of bamboo trellis-work built on the flat house-tops in horizontal rows. Although they make every building look like a complicated telephone exchange with wooden wires, they are symmetrical and the effect is anything but ugly. The bomb, of course, falls gently into this elastic net without, in theory, exploding. In practice it frequently does explode, but the bamboo mesh is reputed to trap the splinters. Nearly every

building had one of these peculiarly indigenous erections, of a size and efficacy varying with the affluence of the landlord.

Content with this their sole certificate against oblivion, the depleted population carried on their ordinary business with one eye on the skies and another on the water, in which they could always jump. The Chinese are a philosophical, and therefore fatalistic race ; they clearly saw nothing remarkable, nothing to jar the routine of normal life, in the prospect of themselves, or their wives and children, lying in a few days' time in tangled stinking piles in the streets. Since this sort of thing happens every day in China, it is perhaps fortunate that their philosophy condones if it does not account for it.

Street avocations vary with nationalities. The British bank clerk, having in the City of London devoted one-half of his lunch hour to the purpose for which it is assigned, is distracted for the other half less by an Indian student parading in national garb than by a group of workmen digging a hole in the road. This particular shaft from the light of civilized amusement has not yet penetrated to the East ; the Chinese have still to discover a profound secular appeal in the performance of normal running repairs to a road or a drainage system. A man, properly appointed, can in a Chinese town remove a manhole-cover without thereby rendering that piece of ground as sacred to the bystander as Lord's cricket-pitch during the tea interval in a match against the Australians. On the other hand the Chinese, those backward people, are

still unaccountably amused by the habits of dress, speech, manner, of members of a strange race of men who come among them, whether for the purpose of assimilating or imparting a doctrine they do not know but do their best to find out.

For this reason the journalist and I, engaged on a pedestrian tour of the town, aroused a good deal of comment in addition to attracting a prodigious retinue which appeared to have nothing better to do than follow us round for the entire day. We escaped, or rather hoped to escape, from the glare of publicity by entering a theatre. Actually, it shone upon us far more brightly than before.

Towards the creation of a Peoples' Theatre the Chinese have probably done more than most nations, and certainly more than the British. For most West End plays the London theatre-goer has still to pay twelve-and-sixpence for a stall ; in China the price of a corresponding seat rarely exceeds a penny. (Pit and gallery are proportionately less expensive.) Whether the Chinese derive more or less æsthetic satisfaction than we do from a form of entertainment which, even allowing for the lower standard of living, is cheaper than ours, is a point which my utter lack of comprehension of the Chinese character does not qualify me to decide. If the reader will bring his own powers of psychological deduction to bear upon my short description of a normal audience's behaviour, he may be able to decide it for himself.

From the audience's point of view theatre-going in China is a family affair, an outing, a kind of picnic.

And you take not only your wife and children, but your mother and father, your mother-in-law, and probably a cousin or a nephew or two. Sometimes you all crowd into a box. Either you have brought with you cakes of rice or *kaoliang*, or else you buy them (this is quite easy, since the lights in the auditorium are always fully on) from a little boy with a tray. You are served, gratis, with tumblers of tea.

Thus amply provided with food and drink, you settle down for an afternoon's or evening's enjoyment. You talk at the top of your voice. You scream with laughter ; your mother-in-law seems irresistibly funny. Perhaps, among yourselves, you play some game. Whatever your, and everybody else's, families are doing, there is always a stupendous din fairly shattering the auditorium. In effect, this licensed pandemonium differs from the kind aroused by an American swing band only in the respect that the official stage proceedings are not, usually, even remotely connected with its cause.

Faced with such competition the actors, those people of temperament, might be supposed to favour a sulky withdrawal. Far from it. To them, Bedlam would seem to be at once a challenge and a spur. Shouts from the stalls, guffaws from the gallery, are treated as so many aspersions cast on the power of the stage orchestra, which chiefly consists of pieces of stick and bits of old petrol cans. The former against the latter are wielded with redoubled abandon ; the activities of the lay inmates of this noisy asylum set the professional musicians on their mettle, in more senses than

one. Tenors, basses, contraltos, sopranos, the speakers of ordinary stage dialogue, all devote their fullest efforts to achieve a self-expression which the pre-occupations of the audience compel to be as self-sufficient as it is loud.

Finally, the stage-hands are not excluded from a part in this aggressively democratic proceeding. After the curtain has risen, they are allowed the freedom of the stage as well as of the wings. They usually, like the audience, bring a child or two and some relations on with them ; they sometimes play mahjong and would appear to sing occasionally ; and if in order to give point to her lines the leading lady should require an extra piece of stage property, she might have to wait for a minute or two until one of the stage-hands was free to go and fetch it. In several ways, the technique of stage-presentation in China differs from the conventions of the West.

The theatre at Swatow offered no exception to the general rule. Except that, when the journalist and myself arrived, the proceedings on both sides of the footlights were temporarily suspended, custom held sway on that afternoon. To those people I have little doubt that we appeared as, and I certainly felt as if we were, a deputation from another planet. The attendant, despite vain protests from us, removed a considerable family which had established itself in our two seats (when we sat in them they were too small for us) ; and before—and even to a lesser extent after—I could signal to the actors to resume the play, we were surrounded by dozens of small, gaping, dirty but

somehow infinitely delightful children who periodically touched us—to see, I suppose, if we were real—and completely obscured the stage from our view and the view of us from the stage.

The play went on at last and I tried to watch it. I will not bore you with its description, except to say that it looked like a pantomime, but was almost certainly a serious play based on a tragic theme. We stayed there an hour. The theatre had a flimsy wooden roof. What with one thing and another—the cacophonous music and the talking and singing—the din was amply sufficient to drown any noise which might have been accepted as an air-raid warning. It was with a feeling of relief, to which not a few causes had contributed, that we at length escaped into the open air.

We returned to the ship.

From Swatow we went direct to Hong Kong, arriving at eleven the next morning. Quarantine regulations—Shanghai had been declared cholera-infected—forced us to anchor in a remote part of the harbour.

It was a beautiful day. Circumstances, however, deprived me of its enjoyment. My ship, I learned for the first time that morning, was to remain in Hong Kong for three days. Except my paramount desire to reach Yunnanfu with all possible dispatch, nothing—least of all my through ticket—prevented me from remaining with it. Everything, indeed, encouraged

me to remain. The blue crowded harbour ; fine houses on the Peak in which friends dwelt (for it is one of the joys of the traveller who has lived in the East that he has friends, as a sailor wives, in every port) ; the nominally paradoxical charms of Repulse Bay ; yachting ; picnics in a car—these and other counter-attractions to Yunnanfu beckoned to me, some of them pictorially in a manner that made a seaside-poster artist about as effective as a child dabbling with grey chalk. I resisted them all. If I was to fulfil my promise to meet Frederico ten days hence in Haiphong, and was to visit Yunnanfu as well, I had not the time to spend three of them here.

Notwithstanding, a glance at the sailing-list convinced me that I might have to. A ship, it appeared, was to leave for Haiphong that afternoon at two ; my present ship was the next. By this time it was midday, the doctor had not yet come on board, my clothes were unpacked, and the quarantine section of the harbour was a full fifteen minutes in a launch from the Bund and the shipping office. Moreover, in the East the hours from twelve to two are dedicated, most sacredly, to luncheon and sleep. That I could transfer my ticket and catch this other vessel at two o'clock seemed, to say the least, pretty unlikely.

But I did, terribly, want to go to Yunnanfu. And this was a kind of traveller's *impasse* in which, for no reason at all, I keenly delight.

I bearded an official and lied to him. My grandmother, I hysterically insisted (I could think of no one else), lay dangerously ill in Haiphong. I must reach

her with all speed and at all cost. Did red tape admit no exceptions? Was I to be forced, which I could ill afford, to charter a special 'plane?

I was not. The official relented. I was given a landing permit (this would have been issued in an hour's time anyway: the ship, not the passengers, was in quarantine) and sent ashore in a special launch. Visions of an augmented tip goaded my cabin steward into frenzied packing of luggage which, if my quick dash yielded a passage on the new ship, I would return to collect.

Hungry and impatient, the passenger department was just going to lunch. I called them back, only to be informed that the ship was full.

"I'll sleep on deck," I told them. I was not, having achieved so much, going to be baulked by a little thing like this.

"As you wish." I shall remember that young man. He was sympathetic and helpful; he had a sense of humour; and on behalf of the company he even offered me, and I accepted, a camp bed. (As it happened, one passenger did not turn up and this was never used.)

I thanked him profusely, took my ticket, the bed and a launch, called at the former ship for my luggage, and arrived at the other, in front of the astonished passengers, with half an hour in hand.

Pleased, I ate lunch. We weighed anchor. My potential three days in Hong Kong had become an actual three hours.

CHAPTER THREE

KILLING TIME

The next four days were, for a number of reasons, rather trying.

Paramount among these was the wasting of time, a then precious commodity to me. Genius was defined by, I think, Shelley as an infinite capacity for taking pains. The definition may or may not be true. The genius, such as it is, of the Chinese is manifest in an infinite capacity for delay.

This flair, this ability of the Chinese to manufacture delay, is too well known to call for a detailed examination here. I propose only to give a short illustration of its effect.

My ship, small, old, and built for cargo, was British-owned ; on the face of it the fault for delay was not Chinese. Delay occurred, however, at Chinese ports, to wit Hoihow, in Hainan Island, and Pakhoi, on the China coast. (These have since been captured by the Japanese.) We reached both places in daylight, at the hour of five in the afternoon ; we left them both at seven in the evening of the next day ; the loading and discharging of cargo took about half an hour at each port. The journey from Hong Kong to Haiphong, even allowing for our maximum speed of about eleven knots, need only have taken two days, and actually

took four. Such cunctation, endured in the Western world, would have been wellnigh intolerable.

No satisfactory answer rewarded my patient inquiries into the reason. I gathered that a certain time-lag in the brains of the port authorities in these outposts only rendered them conscious of our arrival about two hours after it had taken place in fact. By that time it was dark ; we were at both places anchored a mile from the shore ; and the cargo lighters could not, apparently, venture out except in daylight. The continued inactivity on the following day had something (but precious little, as far as I could see) to do with the time of our arrival at the next port ; the convenience of passengers was, from any desire to please, certainly unconsidered, since for reasons of weather it was impossible to find anyone willing to take us ashore.

With nothing to do on the ship, with so much time and so little space to do it in, one inevitably turned to one's fellow-passengers for amusement. Besides me there were five, all men. As I had expected, each of them was using this as the only remaining travel route (other than by air) to unconquered China from Hong Kong and the areas of Japanese occupation. They were a queer lot. I shall introduce them to you somewhat in the manner in which I met them myself.

It is half-past seven on the first evening : the table in the tiny saloon, the only public apartment on the ship, is laid for seven people. The Chinese chief steward, a worried, unhappy man by nature, rings a

bell. Embarrassed, we hover round the table, upon which in each place reposes a card bearing a passenger's name inscribed by the steward in a neat, patient hand. (I wonder idly following what precept of Western, or Oriental, etiquette these cards have been arranged.) Lamb-like, we sit in the appointed seats. The seat at the head of the table waits—unlike us, who are only too anxious to begin—for the Captain. On the left of it, I adjoin on my other side a Westernized Chinese of about thirty who shares my cabin and has already embarrassed me by shaking my hand and confiding in a Hollywood accent that his name is Sidney F. der Wong. (I fear that I am still painfully English in these matters.) He is, he tells me, an American subject.

With that peculiar mixture of humility and superiority that one feels among strangers, I sit, like the others, in silence. Pride of my English self-control restrains me from the garrulity of shyness ; depreciation of my reserve and a desire to be broad-minded spur me, on the other hand, to speech ; and while the latter opponent in this inward wrangle gains, on the whole, more ground, I suddenly realize that no conceivable remark of mine could possibly plumb the depths to which the universal silence has now sunk. The victory comes too late ; all speech, at any rate from me, is now redundant and impossible.

Meanwhile, things go from bad to worse. Mr. der Wong's embarrassed cough turns every head in his direction. The man opposite me has straightened his knife, and I have straightened my tie, for the *n*th time.

The respite caused by the arrival of the soup proves to endure for no longer than it takes us to discover, with a sickening dread, that the noise of its consumption increases our embarrassment tenfold. The whole desperate situation is suddenly liquidated by the advent of the Captain. He is—inevitably on the China coast—Scotch.

He sits down. “There’s a wee breeze springing up.”

That is all he says. The words are trite, platitudinous to a degree. We have all felt the breeze. Yet such is the thickness of the ice which surrounds that table that they fall through the air with the force of so many blows from a pole-axe. We are free, at last, and swimming in the waters, as yet still icy, of conversation. It is about Hitler and the crisis at Munich of the preceding September, and it goes something like this :

The Reverend W. F. Brown (opposite me, an American going up to open a branch of his mission in Yunnanfu. He is conscious of his country’s isolation and also anxious, in view of Mr. Pilkowski, of doubtful extraction, on his right, to be impartial) : What is not quite clear to us in America is the precise nature of the card which the Fuehrer was playing.

(Mr. Brown always refers to the Fuehrer, the Duce, and to such places as Berlin and Tokyo for Germany and Japan.)

Myslef (rushing in to fill the awkward silence occasioned by the universal failure to understand this remark and reluctance to give the fact away) : Nature of what card ?

Rev. Brown (still inclined for parables) : Had he a

strong hand, was he prepared to back up his threats and statements by laying his cards on the table, or was he waiting for Great Britain and France to give up the game?

(There now enter the discussion Mr. Carter and Mr. McBride. Members of the mercantile marine, as chief engineer and chief officer respectively, they travel as passengers and are to fly in a special 'plane from Yunnanfu to Chungking, where they will engage in the difficult task of trying to navigate one of their company's steamers along the upper reaches of the Yangtse. North-countrymen both, they are on the whole taciturn, but when roused, inclined to be bluff. Mr. Brown's question has proved provocative.)

Mr. McBride (forcefully and enigmatically) : He didn't know himself. The man's mad, if you ask me.

(Among this international gathering, such an observation seems to be wanting in tact. Nervous glances towards Mr. Pilkowski, however, reveal that he is more interested in the fish.)

The Captain : He was bluffing, obviously.

Rev. Brown (clearly a politically-minded man) : Was he indeed? That is very interesting.

Mr. Carter (a snake in the patriotic grass) : Of course he was. Chamberlain's an old fool, and Baldwin ought to be locked up. Why didn't these silly fatheads make Britain's policy clearer to Hitler right at the start?

Myself (deeply) : Because of France.

(I do not know what I mean by this, but it is the sort of remark that usually goes down rather

well in these discussions. On this occasion it is unanswerable.)

Mr. McBride : What about Eden ?

(It is always, sooner or later, what about Eden ?)

Mr. Carter (thoroughly worked up) : Pooh ! A tailor's dummy. Worse than any of them, except Baldwin.

(It appears that Mr. Carter's political sympathies, like his face and his hair, are red.)

Mr. der Wong (whose horn-rimmed glasses endue him with a vaguely intellectual air) : I guess the real trouble lay with von Ribbentrop. He didn't believe what the British diplomats told him, and the upshot was that Hitler, who never reads the newspapers and relies on von Ribbentrop, never got a true line on Britain's attitude.

The Captain : I've heard that story. I believe there's a certain truth in it.

Rev. Brown : Is that so ? That is very interesting indeed.

(At this point it has become apparent that while everybody else has uttered at least one remark, Mr. Pilkowski has maintained an inviolable silence. Conscious of the social requirements of his job, the Captain once more brings his pole-axe into play.)

The Captain : What does our friend over there think about it all ? You're not German, by any chance, are you ?

Mr. Pilkowski (with sudden emphasis) : I am Pole.

(He is also thin, youngish, and is dressed with a flashy elegance. Having made this somewhat

equivocal admission, he retreats behind his façade of silence.)

Conversation is henceforth directed towards the safer channels of politics in what Mr. Brown, who leads it, calls the Aarent. Animation increases, for though, with great timidity, we may hazard occasional long shots about Europe, we in China know a good deal about the local war, much of it at first hand. We glide securely through to the coffee. The Captain then retires to the bridge, and we to bed.

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Somewhat or other, I managed to pass those four days. I spent most of the time in unsuccessful attempts to get exercise and evade Mr. Pilkowski.

Mr. Pilkowski was a ship's bore of the first magnitude. Proving to be anything but silent, he seemed at first to be a colourful, romantic figure. He told me that he had once driven a car from Poland to China, through Iran and Afghanistan —a prodigious feat. He lived at present in Hong Kong, where he had some sort of a job as an armaments agent, acting between various American and Czechoslovakian firms and the Chinese government. He was a personal friend of Chiang Kai-Shek's. A keen and splendid shot, he had secured many trophies on big-game expeditions in Indo-China with British army and navy men from Hong Kong.

Although I saw no reason to doubt the truth of these stories, Mr. Pilkowski had a habit of repeating them with such frequency that they rapidly became

stale. He would do this, most often, over drinks in the tiny saloon ; but sometimes he would go further and follow you all over the ship, repeating his stories again in almost unintelligible English. I became very tired of this.

Mr. der Wong was genuine enough (except for his name). Though born in China he was, like his father, registered as an American subject. He had been to school and had graduated at a university in the States. But because he had been born abroad and because his wife was Chinese he was debarred, apparently, from bringing her to live in America. Purely Chinese in blood, his outlook was nevertheless wholly American ; I do not think he cared much about the war in China. On the whole, his position was unenviable. Compelled to live in China against his will, he was inevitably regarded by the foreigners there as Chinese. He did not like the Chinese, and foreigners did not mix socially with him. A man in such a position can have few friends.

He belonged to a firm that assembled aircraft in China from imported parts. A few weeks ago their factory, in Changsha, had ironically been burnt by Chinese fleeing from the city before a Japanese advance that never came. A few days later I met der Wong once more, in an empty shed in Yunnansfu. In company with his American partner he was to begin all over again, from rock-bottom. Yunnansfu had already been raided twice from the air. I admired their courage. I wished them, in all sincerity, the best of luck.

Pakhoi was cold and windy. Large waves dashed themselves and the lighters against the ship's flank. A number of fierce, hardy women (but not a single man) pulled on ropes and carried bales of cotton and vegetables. It was a job, in such a sea, that I myself would have undertaken with the greatest reluctance. The women in Pakhoi appear to be used to it ; in the remoter parts of Kwangtung, as in some other provinces, they perform jobs which the conventions of the West have always assigned to the male of our species. Sometimes I think it would be pleasant to live in Pakhoi.

But not for long.

VISA

Haiphong. Eight o'clock in the morning and very hot. My suit of flannel, for all the coolness it affords, might as well be bearskin. Coolies line the quay. So, farther back, do palm trees. Inert, they presage the greater heat of a windless noon.

Coolies line the quay no longer. They are somehow on the ship. Dozens of them. With gigantic accord, unswerving, they advance towards *me*. Why me? They are dirty. They thrust cards at me that are even, if possible, dirtier. They babble at me an indistinct chorus in pidgin French.

I am no good with natives ; the hand I use against them is anything but firm. I walk away. They follow. They head me off. I dash into my cabin and lock the door. Later, I emerge and they are besieging Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown's hand with the natives is positively leaf-like ; he is compelled, at length, to engage one.

In the crowded saloon pale French officials drink neat whisky with an abstract air, with which they also contrive to surround at any rate the motions of examining passports. The rubber stamp of red tape imprints, on mine, an illegible mauve ring. In this I am one up on Mr. der Wong, whom they mistake, I think, for a Japanese. Later he confides to me, in

the voice of doom, that his papers are Not In Order. But of course they are. And who cares, anyway ?

Ultimately on the quay, I look round. I remember that this is the sort of kitchen-garden gate to China, and that the ways through the front lawn are barred. This explains the hundreds of cheap new lorries, like Czechoslovakian toys, disposed in various fields behind the wharves with an air of having been tossed away by a surfeited Gargantuan child. They will, I learn, be driven across the frontier in due course. Painted with a Red Cross, each is a monument to the world's charity. Curious, I note some of the names : Chinese Patriotic Society of Los Angeles ; Hong Kong International Relief Society ; Burma Chinese Red Cross Fund Society of Rangoon ; and many others. Pity, I am pleased to note, is here not wholly academic.

It is Saturday. I arrive without money and the banks are shut. The hotel frowns upon my traveller's cheque, spurns it like an evil thing ; but I secretly consume a meal of great price and—sensible people—they spurn it no longer.

Trains to Yunnanfu leave daily from Hanoi in early morning. The journey takes three days. I decide to—indeed I must—catch to-morrow's train. But Yunnanfu is in China and I am not ; between it and myself there looms that forbidding, fictitious thing, a Frontier, to cross which a visa, which I lack, is a *sine qua non*. Moreover, the Chinese Consulate in Hanoi closes, in one hour's time, until Monday morning. Hanoi can be reached in two hours.

Confident—remembering Hong Kong—I seize a

telephone and resurrect my grandmother. Will the Chinese Consulate keep open until . . . ? Milles pardons. Est-ce-que le Consulat Chinois restera ouvert cet après-midi pour ma grand-mère ? . . . Ma grand-mère . . . Ou, oui. Elle est malade à Yunnanfu. Très important. Très malade. . . .

They do not, I fear, understand. They demur, but at length concede. I do not like Haiphong and am glad to forsake it for Hanoi, invoking for this purpose a small train which develops a great speed under the influence of a petrol-driven engine. On the way I fall asleep trying to read a French newspaper.

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The Chinese Consulate was as good as its word. Arriving at three o'clock I was received with courtesy and given, inevitably, tea. I filled up a form, surrendered my passport, and after some minutes had it returned to me duly stamped with a visa.

I should explain here that my previous Chinese visa had expired more than a year ago ; although I had continued since then to live in the country I had not renewed it, and neither—as far as I know—had any other foreigner in a like position renewed his. The reason, though curious, was simple : since the fall of the treaty ports there had not existed in those places a form of Chinese jurisdiction to issue visas. The various martial, and later political, orders issued by the local Japanese with regard to their status were always ignored by foreigners on the advice of their consuls. This accorded with the modern diplomatic

practice of neutral countries refusing, as a sort of floral tribute to a dead League, to bring *de jure* into line with *de facto*. Extra-territoriality complicated the issue, and in effect foreigners enjoyed its rights unhampered by its obligations. China was, in fine, and still is a free country in every sense of the word. On any diplomatic map it simply does not exist.

I was going, now, to the only part of China which did exist. Hence the visa.

An odd little scene ensued. I record it as a sidelight on the Chinese character and as a development of the principle of 'squeeze,' which is the unofficial, but not corrupt, exacting of commission.

The visa bore revenue stamps to the value of ten Chinese dollars, and was valid for a year. Since I was only going to be in China for two or three days I wanted, of course, a transit or visitor's visa, the charge for which was a mere two dollars. I explained this. Had they not made a mistake?

Courteously bowing—I was reminded of the typical Chinese villain of Hollywood—the man apologized. Transit visas were issued, he said, to people passing through China, and not to those intending to return by the route of entry. (Evidently he had learnt Latin.)

There was only one way into and out of China at that time, and this was it. The Chinese are full of resource, and they had quickly altered their passport laws to suit a political wind which, though it brought the climate of war, was not so ill that it could not blow a profit somewhere. A good many foreigners were using that railway these days; at ten dollars a head they

must have helped the Chinese visa department to show a most gratifying excess of receipts over expenditure.

But this was only half of the game, less than half.

I paid him, with reluctance, ten dollars in Chinese national currency.

More bows, apologies, and regrets. On the face of this urbane oscillating figure there appeared a most sinister, triumphant smile. What, I wondered, was coming now?

I soon found out. It was infinitely to be deplored, he said—he could do nothing about it, it was the rule—but the fee was payable in Indo-Chinese piastres.

Deplored, most undoubtedly, was the word ; the piastre was exactly twice the value of the dollar. My visa was to cost me not two dollars, not even ten, but twenty.

Mildly annoyed before, I was now furious. "But it says Chinese dollars on the stamps," I remonstrated.

This evidence, this proof of the correct charge cut little ice with him. He discoursed of the Exchange ; the visa, he said, must be paid for in the currency of the town in which it was issued. My arguments were curtailed by courteous but firm threats to withdraw the visa in its entirety. I had to pay up.

International passport usage would have frowned upon such a racket, which perhaps only the Chinese and some American gangsters could have evolved. But the experience, on the whole, was perhaps cheap at the price. I bade him good-day.

For the rest of that afternoon I was free ; I spent it wandering round the town, the name of which, by the way, is pronounced like the English word annoy.

It is not an interesting place. Although it is the capital of Indo-China it achieves mainly a dowdy, French-provincial air. But this is mixed up in an odd sort of way with palm trees, natives, and rickshaws, so that your abiding impression is of a typical French town, say Dijon in the Côte-d'or, plucked out of its natural setting and dumped incongruously in the tropics. All French towns, to my sense, have the same smell, a sort of mixture of tobacco and food, which is unlike any English or German or Spanish or Italian smells. Hanoi has this smell. Advertisements strikingly recall France. Blank walls are filled with the ubiquitous Byrrh ; Benedictines are cried from every hoarding ; Sociétées Anonymes abound, and Crédits Internationals ; every grocer is an Etablissement, every other shop an Et Cie. French food and wines are sold in typically French cafés, and the raw English guest at an hotel confronts in his bedroom an unfamiliar wash-basin which he mistakes for a urinal, and for which there is no soap, anyway.

There you have Hanoi, or some of it. It is a silly and incomplete picture of a place in which I only stayed fifteen hours. I have mentioned neither its lake nor its zoo, fine things by repute ; but this is because I never went to look at them. My chief memory is of the visa racket, which made me, I daresay, prejudiced.

My train was to leave at six the next morning. So

I went to bed early. A notice in my hotel bedroom announced : "Tout lit supplementaire sera facturé \$0.50."

I could not help thinking that this (which is about sixpence) was cheap. Clearly, there was one form of self-control in the tropics which, to say the least of it, the French exerted little influence to encourage.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTO CHINA

The train drew out of the platform, and wound its way like a mechanical snake through the pleasant suburbs of Hanoi. Palm trees grew in the streets. In the native quarter coolies, and a great number of women, carried heavy loads depending from either end of resilient bamboo poles borne on their shoulders. They moved with an odd bouncing motion, half walk, half trot, as if they were anxious to be rid of either burdens. Upon a bridge, more than a mile long, we crossed the delta of the great river known—and rightly, for its colour is brick-red—as the Fleuve Rouge. On its banks Annamese cavalry trained itself by riding Mongolian ponies in circles.

I travelled third-class, for the simple reason that I could not afford to go first, and the more complex one that I desired, as we writers say, to Get Material by Studying the Natives.

I travelled third-class, and the seats were made of wood. So, it seemed, was the train, with the possible exception of the engine and wheels. It was a very crowded and ancient red vehicle ; it looked like a cattle train. For three days it was to be my home ; for two nights—I hoped—I should be able to secure sleeping accommodation at hotels on the way. (The train

—and I was not surprised to discover this—was either unable or unwilling to run at night.)

We had started at 6 a.m. My companions were mostly Tonkinese of both sexes ; there were a few Chinese ; and there was one other foreigner, a large and untidy Frenchwoman. I was both bored and uncomfortable. The windows (of course) had no glass. Equal and ubiquitous portions of dust and soot rendered me partially blind ; I wished I was deaf ; from ten o'clock until one I was painfully hungry and, on beer bought on the train, slightly drunk. To read was agony, to sleep impossible, to talk absurd, and to look out of the window both dull and unnecessary—a rice-field looks like, and indeed is, nothing but a dirty expanse of water.

Two events of slight interest occurred on that day. The French are an extraordinary race : when it comes to a question of producing food under exacting conditions their resource is unbounded and their discrimination unimpaired. A Frenchman will scrap many comforts rather than consent to a meal of scraps. Event number one occurred when, in response to my facetious demand for something to eat from the attendant, he presently brought me, and I rapidly ate, one of the most tender and tasty steaks of my life. This had been cooked in an alcove adjoining, and smaller than, the lavatory.

The meal put me in a good mood to enjoy event number two. The large Frenchwoman—a person of uncertain age who travelled with a great number of mysterious baskets containing, I think, vegetables—had

from time to time consumed quantities of a food which produced upon her, at length, a soporific effect. For some time she had been—it was a miracle in that carriage—asleep. Late in the afternoon she awoke with a start. The train lay snorting in a station. She looked at the platform and then, with great precipitation, had hysterics. All unconscious of her recumbent figure, the train had travelled far beyond her destination.

I feared, at first, that she would literally explode. It was a tense moment and one which was hardly eased when, a few seconds later and before she had had time to unload any of her luggage, the train was under way again—alas, for her the wrong way. She began to pace violently up and down the carriage, cursing me, the attendant, and a lot of other people as well. She waved obese arms and imputed blame on the world at large for what could not, obviously, be anyone's fault but her own ; nor had she, she shrieked at the top of her voice, the money to pay for her fare back. I felt sorry for her, and nearly offered to pay it myself. But humility of confessed penury often combines with pride in resistance to charity to form a human paradox of which I was unprepared to test, at that moment, the truth ; her arms looked all too able and ready to deliver a straight left to the jaw.

Ten minutes later we stopped at another station and she flounced off, her hair in, if possible, a more disordered state than ever. With her dirty, untidy brood of baskets she stood on the platform like a threatened, and threatening, hen. For some seconds

after the train drew out I could still hear her fluttering and cackling. She was a most fantastic female.

Tonkinese women are at once the most beautiful and the most hideous creatures that I have yet seen. On the one hand you have the bourgeoisie, or the part of it that corresponds, more or less, to our upper-middle class. These women are really lovely. With their traditional gowns of close-fitting black satin and, on their heads, a kind of turban of white silk, they achieve a paradoxical aspect, at once nunlike and seductive, which is wholly captivating. They have shapely bodies and they are pretty in a Western rather than an Oriental way ; though their complexions are, of course, dark (i.e. light brown) they lack the high cheek-bones, the broad foreheads, the almond-shaped eyes, of the Chinese. I had been told that they bathed themselves three times a day. It certainly looked like it. The women in the south, I found later, were less cleanly and less beautiful.

On the other hand you have the unequivocal proletariat, the hawkers of cheap food, the scavengers, the scum of the local earth. These women are horrific, like Macbeth's witches, and foul-mouthed in both the figurative and the literal senses, for they swear more comprehensively than any whore, and their teeth are painted black in order to withstand the corrosive effect of the betel nut, which they eat in prodigious quantities. (The nut's kernel is red. Omission by these people of the use of table-napkins usually produced the sinister sanguinary effect of their having sustained recently a few violent blows on the mouth.) This

train, nothing if not democratic, had a fair assortment of both these types of women. The men were all uncompromising.

We rumbled on. It grew dark. Finally the train, having shown a lethargic spirit all day, drew up amid a few lights and expired for the night. An official deprived me of my passport. My wish to recapture in due course this sole certificate of freedom inspired a hope that the dark road along which I now followed my luggage coolie led to the only foreign hotel, to which I also hoped it would be brought. These hopes were idle. The seasoned traveller learns to accept with resignation the frequent and mysterious disappearances of his passport ; one must preserve peace of mind ; and in fact there is never any need to worry, for the thing nearly always turns up again in the end, though sometimes at the last minute. On this occasion it was, as I had expected, brought to the hotel.

In the heart of a jungle, this village, called Laokay, was on the Chinese frontier. Bespectacled, civilian little men with stubby legs, rallied to the banner of the Rising Sun, fussy with cameras and theodolites, came here almost every day—taking French leave from the government of that name—and made rude faces at the disciples of the New Life Movement across the dividing railway line. And the men in their uniforms of faded blue, standing at attention with stocky and dateless Mausers on this their last threshold, glared impotently back the hatred that was in their souls. Around me was being woven a lasting history. I ignored it. I was ravenously hungry.

The hotel lacked a bath, and in many other respects fell short of the ideal. It did, however, produce a meal, and not at all a bad one. I looked like a chimney-sweep, but I ordered some wine, and was content. Two other men, country-clad, dined at separate tables at opposite ends of the room.

I wondered who they were. French, of course. Colonial Service, probably. Over this remote, but transiently important, outpost they kept bravely fluttering the flag of the Republic. *Liberté . . . Egalité . . . Fraternité*. Devil's Island . . . doubtful morals . . . cruelty to animals. In social ethics, how completely un-English! And yet never, politically, has the Entente been so Cordiale as it is to-day.

About them, I weaved an idle tale. For months, perhaps years, they had known each other and, except the station-master, no one else. Day in, day out, in torrid jungle heat, the mannerisms, the voice, the creases in his coat or his tie, the opinions, of one had impressed themselves on the other with inexorable monotony, like rain on a corrugated-iron roof. Boredom had bred hate, familiarity contempt, unequal positions a single jealous irony. With conversation mutually severed between them, they exchanged views only by notepaper, or through a third party. Neither had another soul (except the station-master) to turn to, to laugh, chat, walk, drink with. Banished, each to his self-imposed, self-sufficient solitude, they dined without dinner-jackets and with as much distance between them as the dimensions of the room would allow. I felt an overwhelming sorrow, and admiration, for them. . . .

One of them was an American aircraft engineer spending the night on his way back to Hanoi from Yunnanfu. The other was the owner of the hotel. It would seem that I am fitted for the part rather of a Dr. Watson than of a Sherlock Holmes.

After dinner I went for a stroll with the hotel proprietor.

"Was it amusing to live in that place?" I asked him. I endeavoured not to sound patronizing.

"It is very dull," he answered. "We are in the middle of the jungle here. Nothing ever happens."

He wanted lights, music, dancing, gaiety, motor cars. He was somewhat incongruously placed. I asked him about arms traffic on the railway.

"Since Hong Kong was captured, there has been much. All day long goods trains, with many metres of closed trucks, go rumbling by. They do not stop."

"You must get many interesting people passing through," I said to him. "English, Americans, Germans. Business men trying to sell munitions, food, and clothing." And indeed, had he an inquisitive turn of mind, his job need not have been dull at the moment. This was, after all, the only practical route to China. The trouble was that he did not know a word of English.

We wandered down the narrow street. The population was chiefly Chinese. Eternally busy, they gathered in groups outside native shops and banks, arguing, gambling, offering perpetual oblation to their one and only god, stern and omnipotent, Money.

The Frenchman and I crossed over the railway line.

Once again, I stood on Chinese soil. But it was to prove a very different soil, figuratively as well as in texture and colour, from that which I had left behind me in Tientsin and Shanghai.

Tired, I returned to the hotel and went to bed.

CHAPTER SIX

WONDERFUL RAILWAY

The main railways of Indo-China, almost solely represented by the line running from Hanoi, in the north, to southern Saigon, are owned and run by the government. The single track which goes to Yunnanfu, however, is not. It is owned privately by a concern called the Compagnie Française des Chemins de Fer de L'Indochine et du Yunnan. But there is a good deal more in it even than that. Behind it lies the story of one of the greatest engineering feats in the world ; and the world knows little or nothing about it. (This is partly because the French have always been inefficient at advertising their colonies.)

It is now almost forty years since the French, bent on finding a means to develop their young colony in the East, discovered that the Chinese province of Yunnan contained hills loaded with tin. There it lay, this priceless ore, and there was not a single means of getting it out. Yunnan, loveliest and most fertile of all the provinces, was by reason of its mountains and valleys completely isolated from all other parts of the country and from the world. True, there was the ancient trail to Burma, along which caravans from time immemorial had borne silks and skins to India ; but it was hardly adapted to a trade in such a bulky commodity as tin.

So in 1900 a great number of conscientious French engineers got together with a still greater number of theodolites and other mysterious instruments and finally elected to build a railway. It was finished in 1910, and a quantity of legends survive concerning its making. It is said, for instance, that the laying of every sleeper along its three hundred miles of tortuous track meant the loss, through landslides and dynamite explosions, of as many natives engaged in its construction ; that every station accounted for the death of a white man. I can almost believe it ; the railway is a very prodigious achievement indeed.

Yunnan is almost consistently mountainous. It is a province of swiftly undulating hills and valleys, vast forests, and deep gorges at the bottom of which multitudinous rivers, thrashed into white ribbons of foam, bellow noisily in their clamour for the sea. Through these scenes of incredible beauty the railway was pushed. Often, on frail but dauntless bridges, it crosses and recrosses the gorges, affording sometimes a vista of 1,000 feet to the depths below. The single narrow track passes through one hundred and seventy-two tunnels with a total length of 15 miles. (Behind an ancient, laborious steam engine, and in carriages whose wide windows have never known the protection of glass, you are not likely to forget this. Coming off the train with a sore throat you feel, and look, not unlike a coal miner who has just completed his shift.) A hundred and seven bridges and viaducts have a span of not less than 65 feet. And at the end of the journey you find

yourself on an immense plain, 7,000 feet high, dotted with lakes, and revealing an extremely fertile soil of a colour that is almost brick-red. In the middle of this lies Yunnanfu, the capital, which should, incidentally, be spelt Kunming and pronounced Gwenming, or something like it. The journey is unforgettable.

It appears that, by the recondite operations of extra-territoriality, the French, who own the railway, have also secured a kind of permanent leasehold on the ground covered by the track. Presumably it is for this reason that the Yunnanfu railway is the only one in China which has not, at one time or another during the war, been bombed by Japanese aircraft. I shall discuss this more fully in a later chapter. As far as it concerned me now, it was no more than a comforting reflection while I travelled on the line as a passenger.

My train left Laokay at 6 a.m. I was called somewhere about five, and after a hasty but enormous breakfast made for the station in a slight drizzle. Not more than a few feet above sea-level, Laokay is also in the tropics, and so it was quite warm. Of my companions of the previous day, only a single, dumb Chinese had remained at the end of the journey. He must have spent the night at a Chinese hotel ; and here he was, oddly incongruous in the dawn. We had exchanged not the faintest communication on the day before, and now we were grinning and nodding at one another like the very oldest of friends. I have noticed this kind of thing before. Strangers are thrown together by chance in a confined space, say on a ship or a train or in the same hotel. Neither of them may

acknowledge, by as much as a word or a look, that he is even remotely conscious of the presence of the other ; and yet when they meet again, in a different setting, they are full of smiles and courtesies, as though they had in the past performed all manner of interesting deeds together. I cannot possibly think why we do this, unless it is because the force of a mutually recognized coincidence brings people, in some strange fashion, more closely together.

I do not like getting up early. I am one of those people whose dislike of such a practice is only equalled by their distaste for retiring to bed on the night before. I had therefore some justification for being annoyed when the train, having quitted Laokay at the appointed hour, proceeded not more than a quarter of a mile up the line and came to rest, at a station just over the frontier, until half-past ten. Had there been a break-down or other extraneous cause for delay, I should have quelled impatience with the platitudinous thought that accidents will happen. But there was nothing of the kind. It was due to no other reason than the time-table. The price of another four hours in bed might have been settled by a mere walk of as many hundred yards ; yet I had been told that if I did not get up at five I should miss the train. This sort of thing, though, is always liable to happen in China, where such a dimension as time, never important, is frequently ignored altogether.

We soon began our long ascent of 7000 feet, and in an hour or two had climbed above the low-drifting clouds and found ourselves in a world full of fantastic

wild-fowl, waterfalls, great hills and forests, and strange tribes. It was unlike any other earthly place.

The climate of Yunnan is probably the best in the world, California's not excepted ; but despite both this and the railway the province is scarcely inhabited. Vast tracts of it are almost unexplored, even by the natives ; and many of the natives are not Chinese at all but consist of a great number of primitive, almost wild—though not hostile—types, fantastically, even gaudily dressed with embroidered cloaks and necklaces of coloured wood, and belonging to races called Shans, Wahs, Miaoos, and other such. Ethnological students could run riot in a country like this. Now and then we passed groups of these tribes on the line ; perhaps one of them, with his poisoned arrows, would have killed a leopard or a tiger-cat, and this trophy, slung across a pole, they would be bearing in triumph to their wooden huts.

Except on the occasions when an uncompromisingly rustic French railway engineer hopped on for a journey between two stations (to be forthwith button-holed by me), I was the only foreigner on the train. There were, however, plenty of other people, the most interesting being a group of Chinese which had boarded the train at the frontier. They numbered about six ; they were in, I suppose, their middle twenties ; and they wore khaki trousers and leather golf-jackets, signifying what I presumed was the partial uniform of the Army or Air Force, though I did not, at first, know which. Two of them had young, attractive wives, and one of these couples possessed a small boy of about three. A

captivating creature, he had a fetching habit of standing on the seat and throwing banana peel and bits of paper all over the place, shrieking, as he did so, at the top of his voice. These impromptu theatricals were a riot, and he knew it ; he gave encores throughout the day. The only person that seemed bored by them was his mother, who somewhat surprisingly deprecated her own self-fulfilment in the antics of her son.

These people, clearly of an educated class, university graduates, could not, strangely, speak English or French. I speak hardly any Chinese and therefore enjoyed their society at a linguistic remove. They seemed to me to be very different from the commercial type of Chinese that you see in the treaty ports. They were, I thought, more at home, more able to express themselves, as a community than as individuals, which is abnormal in the Chinese. Intensely patriotic, they sang national ditties in sing-song voices and to tunes that were catching even to my Occidental ears, and which bore no relation whatever to the wonted Chinese music such as I had heard in the theatre at Swatow. They were very cheerful. They reminded me rather of a collegiate group of contemporary American youth, partisans at a football match whose opponents, to which much reference was made, were the Japanese eleven—or whatever number comprises an American football team.

The Chinese in the treaty ports, in Shanghai, Tientsin, Peking, and Hankow, appear to be completely devoid of patriotism. Even in the foreign concessions, where they are comparatively safe, they do not bristle, leap, turn pale or red in the face, at sight of a group of

Japanese soldiery. They are cowed, listless, apathetic ; they have accepted with inevitable resignation, without comment even, the new order of things, the total disappearance of that undercurrent of patriotic pride which is responsible for a good deal of individual, as well as national, self-respect. Doubtless this cannot be helped. The few anti-Japanese demonstrations that do break out are quickly suppressed, either by the Japanese themselves (outside the concessions) or, a little later and after the inevitable exchange of notes and protestations, by the intimidated foreign authorities. Perhaps the acquiescent Chinese in these places are behaving in the most sensible way. They do, after all, thus ensure their personal safety, and economically they are not in a worse position than they were before. China, as is well known, has never been united ; its largest collective unit has always been the family. Although the war has compelled the various factions to sink their grievances and gravitate into one fervent body, I was nevertheless struck, and disappointed, by the universal apathy towards the loss of a cause which might have been, was even —under Chiang's New Life Movement—beginning to be, so great. (Though I knew that the preliminary Japanese opium campaign had been the reason for some of it.)

But here, on this train, I was reading the preface to a very different story. These people, I felt, would gladly die for a cause which kept them spiritually alive ; no privations, no pain and suffering, were too unbearable to be sustained by efforts to crush the enemy. But it is, of course, a good deal easier to be patriotic at home

than as a prisoner in the enemy's camp, however recently pitched that camp may be.

However, there were traitors, promoters of self-interest, even in this hotbed of nationalism, as you shall presently see.

The day's journey ended at Kai Yuen, a village about 3,000 feet high, or nearly half the altitude of Yunnanfu. It was appreciably colder ; I was glad to have my overcoat. The train attendant, directing me to the station bungalow—there was no foreign hotel—warned me against walking alone through the streets at night. There were bandits, he said. I thanked him, but considered that my dire need of exercise rendered the risk worth taking. I saw—need I say it?—not a sign of a bandit.

In the tiny dining-room I was, once more, not alone. A middle-aged man, with a moustache and a slightly alcoholic look, was taking his meal at a table a few paces away. I was itching to address him as early as the soup course. Two days had elapsed since I had had a chance of uttering more than a few dozen words ; for three days I had not spoken English ; I yearned for a chat with an Englishman or an American, and suspected that this man was the former. He obviously thought me French. We peered at each other covertly, hastily averting our eyes whenever they met. It was not until I heard him give an order that I was convinced about *him*.

"Voolay-voo," came in hesitant, unmistakable B.B.C. tones, "vooley-voo don-nay mwa oon beer?"

This was my cue. "I wondered if you were English, sir," I exclaimed, in my instinctive relief not immedi-



(Above) "A SOIL OF A COLOUR THAT IS ALMOST BRICK-RED"

(Below) "IT LOOKED LIKE A CATTLE TRAIN"

ately aware that this disclosure at such a time was perhaps less tactfully stated than it might have been.

He did not seem offended. "So you're English, too, are you?" he said.

Soon we were both talking hard. He was a retired army medical man, living on his pension. Stationed for many years at Singapore, he had grown accustomed to the place and preferred, rather than go home, to remain out there. He told me that, while attending a recent international medical conference in Hanoi, he had been charged with a philanthropic mission to Yunnanfu, in order to find out on what kinds of medical supplies the money raised by relief committees in Singapore and elsewhere could most profitably be spent for the benefit of Chinese wounded. To have sent the funds themselves to the Chinese government would have entailed waste of time, since the supplies would still have to be ordered from abroad. The Englishman was now on his way back.

"Some of these Chinese officials are pretty unmitedated swine," he told me.

"How so?" I asked.

"One of them said in effect, taking me discreetly to one side: 'Don't send anything, man. Send the money to me and I'll see that you and I go fifty-fifty.' What is the point of trying to help a nation whose government officials are as corrupt as that?"

Which rather speaks for itself. I do not know the answer to such a question.

This state of affairs, this business of high Chinese officials, and particularly of generals, selling themselves

to the enemy or in other ways prostituting the cause for which they stand and retiring on the proceeds, has been going on for years. In the old days of petty political factions one expected it ; like the exacting of squeeze it was part of the rules of the game.

But it was part of them no longer. In this grim struggle it was treason of the worst order. And in the new, unified, patriotic China it was, to say the least of it, anomalous.

The Englishman and I talked on into the night. At length fatigue, jointly caused by two days in the train and the fantastic hours at which I had been compelled to get up in the mornings, drove me to seek my bed. To find it was not easy, since as the bungalow was full I had been allotted quarters in an annexe about half a mile away. The sky's face, dotted with bright stars before dinner, was now masked by thick cloud. As I blindly staggered along the unlit road, steering by the distant glimmer of a window, a chance encounter with a bandit seemed to me to be a less apocryphal, as well as a far less welcome, danger ; but I reached my annexe unmolested. Three separate doors were unlocked by a sleepy coolie, and I got into bed and tried to go to sleep.

But it was a long time before I succeeded. For I was still in the train. All through the night the bed rocked and shunted, we rattled over sleepers, the shadowy faces of a hundred fellow-travellers haunted my own. It was terrible. Would I never reach my destination, never see the last of this smoked-filled, creaking automaton ?

At long last I did.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

"*PER ARDUA . . .*"

"Are you English?"

He had looked over my shoulder at the book I was reading. He was one of the men in khaki trousers.

I replied that I was. He was overjoyed. "I was thinking all the time that you were French," he told me, grinning. He was flat-nosed, swarthy; he had high cheek-bones, like a Mongol. You would have thought him the last person to know English, but as a matter of fact he spoke it quite well.

We exchanged cards, a much-observed formality in China. Mine bore the address of a well-known London club which had, however, become defunct since I had been in the East. One side of his card was printed in English. It said, Captain Chu, number 32 Pursuiting [sic] Squadron, Chinese Air Force. The [sic] is mine. Then we talked.

Before the war started, he had learnt flying from British instructors in the southern province of Kwangsi, and later in Japan. He was—at least he said that he was—a good pilot. He told me that he had shot down six Japanese bombers.

"What country supplies China with its aeroplanes?" I asked him.

"Russia, chiefly. But quite a lot come from Great

Britain." He knew nothing about German or American supplies.

"Are your friends here in the Air Force too?"

"Yes, all of them. We're going home to Kunming on sick leave."

I looked at the brown, laughing faces. Though two of them walked with a stick, they seemed on the whole as fit as I was. I could not see what excuse they had for going on sick leave, but I did not say anything.

Captain Chu offered me a cigar, which I declined. He stood me a cup of coffee. Evidently the Air Force was well remunerated. He was very talkative, very proud of his English. In an esoteric fashion he discussed literature ; he was an authority on P. G. Wodehouse and had heard of Aldous Huxley. Anxious to impress me, he produced a variety of long words, not always in a recognizable context ; and when I told him I was a writer he regarded me with reverence.

Did I live in London ? I did ? Then of course I knew Flying Officer Robinson. Flying Officer Robinson, the soundest of fellows, also lived in London. He had taught Captain Chu how to fly, and the two of them were great friends.

I had to explain about London. London, I said, was very big, bigger than Shanghai and Canton rolled into one. The name of his friend was not an uncommon one—I explained that it was like the Chinese name Wong, which is the surname of about half the families in China—and probably there were a good many Flying Officer Robinsons. I was afraid that I did not

know any of them. I fancy this put me at a slight discount ; there was clearly some sort of defect, something a little out of date, about a man who did not know Flying Officer Robinson.

A stern patriot, he began to speak of the Japanese. He and his friends were ready to fight them until they died. He seemed to know most of the events of the war. Was he not sometimes depressed, I asked, a little inclined for despair, by the relentless advance of the invaders ? After all, China had not yet scored a single appreciable victory either on land or in the air. Surely there could be but one inevitable end to all this. What was the point of China carrying on ?

There was, of course, a great deal of point, which Captain Chu recognized and very convincingly argued, and which I shall attempt to analyse from other sources in a later chapter. China, he assured me, was not drawing defensive bows at a venture ; she had prodigious plans.

He did not conceal his hatred of the Japanese as a nation. Of the enemy pilots as individuals he had the understanding, and for them the sincere and jealous admiration, of an inferior craftsman for the more dexterous exponent of his own trade. He was filled with wonder and envy for their courage, of praise for their unerring marksmanship. They were splendid, noble fighters, more ready to die for the imperialistic cause than were a vast number of Chinese for the republican.

This made me think. It has for long been a precept for democracies to sneer at totalitarianism ; it was a

natural corollary for the feeling to extend to semi-fascist Japan, allied, however academically, to the totalitarian bloc. Japan, threatening British and American interests in the Far East, has alienated the sympathy of those countries for a reason quite apart from her relentless bombing of open towns, which is, after all, a strategic weapon likely to be used by every country waging war in the future. It is possible to contend that from such hypotheses, the "logical" condemnation by foreign militarists and airmen of Japanese bungling in the field and in the air, of her antique strategy, may perhaps owe something of its force to prejudice. The conclusion that smaller batteries of a modern Western army could make short shrift of Japanese units in the field, that Western aviators are more skilled and more effective, may to some extent be the child of the wish. It is a common human failing, and one not always recognized, that this is frequently so.

One factor in the Japanese Air Force situation is sometimes overlooked. Most of their bases are on newly acquired territory ; often this is right in the front line of the Japanese army, and this, it must be remembered, is an army of occupation on foreign soil, whose supplies must arrive by sea. From the moment when a plane takes off until it lands again it flies exclusively over enemy ground. The enemy anti-aircraft defences are admittedly few and inefficient, but even so a long period of such flying must be something of a strain for a Japanese pilot who may at any time be obliged to make a forced landing, with its attendant risk—and

this is considerable—of being murdered by Chinese soldiers in preference to being conveyed to the base as a prisoner. Again, Japanese pilots are charged with securing, if humanly possible, photographs of objectives immediately bombed. The sense of anti-climax in this, the fear that such a delay might spell the difference between capture and triumphant escape—bearing in mind the clear strategic advantage of such photographs—must come as a great temptation to courage, patience, and dogged determination. That Japanese pilots are not lacking these qualities is proved by, among other ways, the frequency with which they get the photographs ; and the bombing has, on the whole, been at least as accurate as the bombing by insurgent machines in Spain.

To compare Japanese airmen with Chinese is like basing the merits of a racing driver on the licensed, and frequently actual, powers of a person whose car bears the red letter L. The Japanese are so markedly superior that such a comparison reveals nothing. The Chinese are on the whole good mechanics ; they are adept at driving a car, which is not an easy thing to do in a normal Chinese street ; so why they should make such imperfect pilots is a question of which the only solution would seem to lie in inadequate training and practice. In this connection I could not help remembering the tragic performances of Chinese aircraft during the defence of Shanghai. For days on end, for instance, pilots had circled round the Japanese flagship *Izumo*, lying in the Wangpoo just outside the International Settlement. They dropped dozens of

bombs, every one of which harmlessly plopped into the water, wide of its mark. The flagship was never hit. The only deaths (with few exceptions) among foreigners during the fighting, and the only damage to the Settlement, was inflicted not by Japanese but by Chinese bombers ; and the damage was accidental.

Captain Chu had been talking for some time. His intelligence did not seem to me spurious, and I should have enjoyed the conversation even had it not come as such a welcome relief from the monotonous silence which this train journey had enforced upon me. Chance encounters such as this are one of the chief delights of the traveller ; they are usually quite unexpected ; and it is seldom that they do not afford some new and surprising angle from which to examine one's own little life, and enable one to embark upon such original reflections as that it takes all sorts to make a world. So far I had been lucky on this trip. The ubiquitous Mr. Pilkowski, with his romantic tales ; plucky der Wong ; the grave and somewhat unctuous Mr. Brown ; the volatile Frenchwoman ; the red-faced retired British M.O. (who had confessed to a shameless liking for Indo-China on account of the elastic morals of the French) ; Captain Chu of number 32 Pursuiting Squadron—all these, each in his own way, had not failed to enrich my experience, and to impress upon me that it was as well not to take my own life too seriously because of its true insignificance. I always think—I have been dying to say this and it had to come out sooner or later—that Travel Broadens The Outlook.

It was now latish in the afternoon. We had climbed up on to the 7,000-feet plateau and were skirting a great lake, magnificently blue. There was a perceptible chill in the rarefied air. Wild geese flew across the plain. In the innumerable quiet stations was a strong smell of eucalyptus trees. Chinese aeroplanes, black silhouettes barely discernible against the red earth, droned along a valley a thousand feet below us. The sun had dipped behind a curtain of hills, between incomplete folds of which it thrust now and then shafts of pale light, dust-scattered. The hills were dark against a sky of rose and green. Venus shone bravely forth, an unflinching point of light pricking the dusk. Outside, it was quiet and peaceful. The train laboured in its final agony, and the Chinese baby, tired at length, slept.

A CITY WITH A FUTURE

One factor had been giving me faint trouble during the last hour or two of this journey. People in Hanoi had told me that Yunnansfu was full, that unless one had booked a room at an hotel several weeks in advance it was impossible to secure accommodation of any sort. Despite this, I was determined to go there ; and I knew that, in the last resort, I should be certain to find the proprietor of a Chinese inn who, for the sake of a few dollars, would compel some of his family, if necessary, to exchange the bed in their room for the hardly more uncomfortable floor in the passage outside. I could get my meals at a foreign hotel. Now, as the train drew into the station, I speculated on what my fortune would be.

It was dark. As I stepped off the train Chinese customs officials or police—I do not know which—demanded to see inside my bag. I had not expected this, but luckily the forbidden camera was tucked safely in my overcoat pocket. The bag had been hastily packed that morning. Pyjamas, sponges, hair-oil, bedroom slippers sprang forth and littered the unclean platform like objects arbitrarily disposed in a jumble sale. The men were perplexed by these uncompromising possessions, and not a little suspicious of them. Had I

been an arrested burglar newly arrived at a police station their search could hardly have been more painstaking. Having patiently unscrewed, and screwed up again, the caps of my tooth-paste and shaving-cream, and bared my hair-brushes, and shaken out my shoes, I was allowed to proceed. I did so, and from a safe distance looked back. They were staring after me. They were still puzzled, still doubtful of their discretion in letting me through, as a man must be who wonders whether the face of a vanishing figure corresponds to the photograph, which appeared in the morning's paper, of a wanted character. I felt very small, and wondered if I had about me a wild look.

The station yard, of capacious dimensions, was void. Not a car, not the faintest suspicion of a rickshaw, graced its empty Kerbs. This was most odd. Was there an air raid in progress? Had the affrighted population rushed into the country, or under ground? There were no lights, certainly. Captain Chu shouted good-bye. With the other passengers he was striding off with that air of unswerving purpose, of inevitable conviction, which characterizes rush-hour crowds at a London tube station. I began to feel lost.

There were no coolies. My bag was not heavy; at the same time I had no wish to carry it for an indefinite period to a destination as conjectural as the terminus of a rainbow, and through a town whose streets were as unfamiliar to me as the byways of Timbuctoo. I played for time. I lit a cigarette, sat on my bag, and shivered.

Presently there sauntered into the yard a bus. A

very large, a very grey, a very comfortable bus. Grand Hotel du Lac, it announced in glittering red paint. It came to rest beside me. I climbed in, alone. "Proceed," I commanded with a lordly air. And off we went through narrow, cobbled, mountainous streets, now comfortably populated with rickshaws and pedestrians.

This was a stroke of luck. I knew nothing whatever about the Grand Hotel du Lac, and of course it would not have a room for me. But someone there would be able to advise, to direct me. I should have access to a telephone. (About the telephone, my assumption was correct. I soon learned, however, that together with numerous other desirable reverions to barbarism, all Yunnansu telephones had for long been out of commission.)

The hotel proved to be a converted temple ; it owed its name to being situated on an island, reached by a bridge, in the middle of a large opaque pond from the womb of whose surface prodigious crowds of mosquitoes periodically burst upon an astonished world. To my infinite delight and surprise they offered me a room at a price which my relieved feelings did not dispose me to quibble over. I took it. I inquired about the empty station yard. Two French aviators, it appeared, had crashed into one another and been killed on that afternoon ; their bodies had been taken to the station. Which explained, also, why the bus had arrived later than the train, which itself had been late.

Then I had a bath, from which I emerged gratefully minus my coating of soot.

I went to bed early, and the next morning I had finished breakfast and was out in the thin, frosty air by eight o'clock. It was a lovely day, like a fine morning of an English spring. Rooks were clamorously fussy in neighbouring elms. Students in long gowns sauntered to their classes, their footsteps ringing clearly on the stone bridge. Bugles shrilled thinly across what I suppose I must call the lake. (The hotel is close to the barracks.)

After the usual ten minutes' bargaining (dear to the Chinese heart) with the coolie, I hired a rickshaw for the morning at a rental of two dollars an hour.

Here I must digress for a moment on the topic of the local currency. The official banknotes of China, the ones recognized and freely convertible into foreign exchange by the European and American banks, are chiefly—there are one or two others—those issued by the Bank of China, the Central Bank of China, and the Bank of Communications. I very soon found that in Yunnanfu the ten-cent denomination of these banks was the equivalent of a dollar elsewhere, in other words that the notes were worth ten times their face value. I had brought a good many of these notes with me, and this discovery was of a sort calculated to encourage spending on a lavish scale. On the basis of securing everything you want for a tenth of its normal price, financial problems happily dwindle to the insignificance of the price of a meal at a Lyons tea-shop to a millionaire. However, my visions soon proved—as all my financial visions do, sooner or later—chimerical. Here, then, was the snag. *The price of everything that you bought*

had been multiplied by ten. (As a matter of fact it had been multiplied by more, because goods, at least imported goods, were harder to obtain in Yunnanfu than in anywhere else in China at the moment.) When I paid my rickshaw coolie two dollars, I was getting the equivalent value of twenty cents in, say, Shanghai. Although my ten-cent note was exalted to the value of a "dollar," I could only buy goods here for ten "dollars" which Shanghai offered me for one Bank of China dollar.

The situation had arisen in the following way. Yunnan had always—particularly before the rise of Chiang Kai-Shek—been regarded as a province apart, both physically and economically, from the rest of China. For years it could only be reached by sea, and even now its only direct approach is through the Yangtse gorges and the even more mountainous province of Szechwan, along roads which are little better than cart-tracks. As a consequence it had its own currency system ; the local banks issued notes which were not convertible with Bank of China money at their face value. A local inflationary policy, and the passage of time, found the Yunnan dollar being gradually depreciated until it became approximately one-tenth the value of the national currency. At this point it was stabilized and in fact—though you may still see an occasional old Yunnan dollar note—the notes were withdrawn from circulation and the ten-cent Bank of China note circulated as a dollar, the one-dollar note at ten dollars, and so on. This is happening to-day and will probably go on happening for years to come. A

quaint and—to a visitor—confusing custom, it illustrates the spirit of conservatism abiding in the Chinese interior. Much of contemporary life in Yunnanfu is as it was centuries ago.

In the streets, for instance, through which my rickshaw coolie was now plodding and uttering the while a kind of permanent scream, the majority of the vehicles seemed to have existed since the beginning of time. Ancient carts, drawn by oxen, buffaloes, or donkeys, squeaked along upon wheels which had long ceased to revolve with a circular motion. Attrition of cobblestones had worn them almost square, so that you rode on them with a feeling vividly akin to the experience of a trip on one of those roundabouts in an English fair, on which the horizontally revolving vehicles have also a perpendicular action highly conducive to seasickness. As in all other Chinese towns the population, nine-tenths of whom in this place were hawkers and pedlars of a sort carrying their wares, had no traffic sense whatever; little short of actual contact with something more powerful than they, such as a road vehicle, would induce them to alter their course in the slightest, which they invariably did with an aggrieved air.

The town as a whole presents the very ancient Chinese, and the very modern Gallic, stages of civilization in a startling combination of opposites. Peering into the dim square interiors of its shops, into the fusty cavities now quiet and now insistently clamorous with strange pipings and flutings on still stranger musical instruments, you are a little disconcerted to

find them brightly illumined at night by the anachronism of electric lights. It is as though one were to stage a night-club cabaret in a cathedral crypt. At the end of a line of crumbling, historic temples a modern power-plant rears its outlines in concrete and steel, like the model of a dance-band leader which has found its way into the Tudor Hall at Madame Tussaud's. Motor-cars, of which there are several, are no more appropriate to the streets of Yunnanfu than are hansom-cabs to Fifth Avenue in New York. It is all very annoying. The most diehard radical could scarcely fail to resent the presumptuous modern gilding of such a classical lily as this.

But I suppose that, had it not been for the influence of the West, places of its kind might waste for ever their ancient sweetness upon the—at least—tenuous and unreflecting air, might perpetually have their praises unsung. Certainly, as you gaze with rapture at your surroundings, the inhabitants have not the faintest idea of what all the fuss is about, and would very sensibly refrain from publishing it abroad even if they had.

I had with me on that morning a letter of introduction to a Mr. Li. This gentleman had before the war been a professor of engineering at the Tsinghua University in Peking. I hoped that he would be able to tell me something interesting. What he did tell me was perhaps not of any great interest to the general reader, but I think some of it is worth recording briefly.

Professor Li spoke tolerable English. A plump but serious figure, wearing the long full gown of the Chinese intellectual, he received me on the terrace of a temple which appeared about to fall down at any minute. Chairs and a table were brought out and we drank tea. Around us three-quarters of the fair-sized courtyard had been converted, a few days previously, into an air-raid shelter. The piled earth, still damp, looked like the covering of a huge new grave. Was this, I wondered, a sinister symbol not only of the death of Chinese culture but of China itself? Not if Professor Li, and a few others like him, could help it.

In this temple, which bounded the square courtyard on its four sides, were housed the engineering sections (or what remained of them) of the Tsinghua and one other universities from Peking, and the great university of Nankai, the destruction of whose buildings by Japanese aircraft in Tientsin I had witnessed, more than a year ago, from a high roof in the safety of the British Concession. Other temples, sheds, disused shop premises, dotted over the town, did service for all the other branches of these three universities, whose undergraduates had hitherto known either the quiet, ancient dignity of their surroundings in Peking, or the shining, up-to-date equipment of new Nankai, now reduced to a few charred remnants of wall. Heartrending? Yes. But this was not all. How did they get there? And what strange urge, what blind faith, had induced them not only to keep alight the torch of learning but to bear it flaming over the mountains to the distant darkness of Yunnanfu?

This is how it was done.

At the time of the Lukuchiao incident, which started the war near Peking in July 1937, the students of these universities were on long vacation. Most of them were not in Peking or Tientsin at all, but in their homes farther south, perhaps in Shanghai. Unwilling to submit to Japanese control, these students, with the Faculty, ultimately forgathered at the town of Changsha, south of Hankow, which they reached via the port of Tsingtao and thence by the Lunhai and Pinghan railways, which at that time were still held by the Chinese. By some means or other—I forget how—they had managed to move a few textbooks and valuable scientific instruments from the university buildings before the Japanese got at them ; those that were left have probably been destroyed. In Changsha, then, they carried on their studies as best they could. They stayed there a year, after which adjacent military operations urged a move to the deeper interior. The selected city was Yunnanfu.

It was now that their astonishing history really began. They were faced with a very real, a very grave problem : how to get there. To proceed north, south, or east was impossible owing to the Japanese ; and even if they had by some miracle reached the coast, the coast also was Japanese. One way lay open to them : the road south of Chungking and thence to Yunnanfu—the direct westerly route it is true, but one for which they had no conveyances and where the road surfaces were astonishingly bad. Just, therefore, as there was only one way to go, there was only one way

of traversing that way. And that one way was to walk.

Well, most of them did it. Professor Li himself had done it. It was a journey of about a thousand miles and it had taken them three months. Clothes, books, instruments, as many personal effects as they could carry, had been brought with them. At nights they had eaten and slept at inns which lined the way. . . .

So now a sad, a brave pilgrimage, two thousand strong, had at last in this distant corner pitched the battered altar of knowledge, of liberty, of patriotism, which they had so patiently and laboriously carried with them. An empty gesture, you say? A non-material and useless means of helping their country in its hour of need? To this my answer is non-committal. I would only say, I hardly suspect that that long walk was in its major aspects a riot of fun, while realizing, of course, that this is not an argument on the side of useful patriotic service.

I returned to my hotel—which was French-owned by the way—for lunch. Most of the guests—though why a person who pays a considerable sum for board and lodging at an hotel should be referred to as a guest I do not know—were French; but there was a large group of business men with, among them, a predominant German flavouring and a dash of English and American.

In the afternoon, I told myself, I would take photographs.

Now the man (or woman) who carries a camera on his travels in the Far East will certainly, by so doing, lose peace of mind in addition to running a grave risk of incarceration. In Russia they are taboo ; at least the authorities by sealing up the shutters render them for practical purposes useless. The Japanese regard them with the gravest suspicion, and enforce such rigid rules that anyone going on a visit to Japan could ensure its tranquillity in no better way than by leaving them behind.

Infringement of these nations' laws renders you subject to the most exacting penalties. During Easter of that year, for instance, I had been one of a party visiting the lama temples of Jehol, capital of the northern province of that name which had recently been annexed to the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. The party numbered ten, and included the war correspondent of a Rome newspaper who had been in, among other places, the American gunboat *Panay* when she was sunk by the Japanese. Laden with civil, diplomatic, and military passes from the Japanese consular bodies of Peking and Tientsin, we started from the former city along the railway line which had been completed only a few days before. Until then only one foreigner had travelled on it, and I think the sudden appearance of our—relatively—enormous party somewhat disconcerted the officials at the newly opened frontier station. Due, I think, more to nerves and a feeling of inferiority than to any hostile cause, they were wildly aggressive.

Japanese customs officials are notorious foils for

foreign literary humorists. The reader has probably a vicarious knowledge of the kind of conversation which lights up encounters with them. This will not prevent me from recording ours, which went like this :

“ Have you dutiable goods ? ”

“ No, nothing of that kind at all.”

“ What purpose you have to visit Manchukuo ? ”

“ We are tourists. We are going to see the famous temples of Jehol.”

“ So.” Pause. Sucking of Japanese teeth accompanied by sharp intaking of breath. Violently, “ You have passports ? ”

“ Certainly.” This is our moment of Triumph. We produce them. We heap upon him thirty passes, three each. The official feels—and rightly—that he is being made a fool of. He starts to shout. Fixing on a member of the party a fierce glare, he bellows suddenly :

“ What age your father, pleess ? ”

This is a nasty one. But the man is equal to it.

“ My father is dead.”

“ So.” Another pause. The official, in his turn, is equal to this. “ If father not dead, what age, pleess ? Very sorry for you.”

The refrain “ very sorry for you ” recurs frequently throughout these catechisms. A sort of signature tune, it is meant to convey to you that the official is only doing his duty, that he is no more than a pawn in the regrettable hands of a higher Japanese autocracy. This is strikingly belied by his obvious use of initiative powers, by his capacity for asking questions which can

only have been suggested by the moment's inspiration, guided by our previous answers.

The posthumous age of the father being given and noted, the cross-examination takes another surprising, another splendidly irrelevant, turn.

To a lady, " You have French husband, pleess ? "

" No. I am not married."

" So. You are not Maori." Suck, suck. He writes it down.

Voice from the party, sed up : " She's a Red Indian squaw."

" Squaw ? So. Squo. Very sorry for you. You have children, pleess ? "

Placidly, " I have quintuplets. I have not brought them with me."

" Quin . . . ? Excuse, pleess ? "

" Quintuplets. Q-u-i- . . ." The official writes.

But this must be enough, though it goes on for longer. The great thing is that we Keep Him Off Cameras. And now, as cameras were my pretext for this diversion, I had better go back to them.

The Italian journalist and I had both brought cameras, having ignored the advice of our several embassies which had been heeded by the others. We took a great many photographs of the Jehol temples, but unhappily the activities entailed had been witnessed by Manchukuo police. Italy's relations with Japan being at that time more friendly than Great Britain's, the journalist offered to assume the full responsibility of which, on my part, I was only too glad to be rid. They took away his films, promised to

develop and forward all negatives uncompromising from a military point of view, and allowed him to leave Jehol with us. Glad of his personal escape, yet still faintly trembling from its narrowness, he was disconcerted at being arrested at the frontier station and conveyed back to Jehol under an armed escort. They mistook him, apparently, for a spy.

So far, when asked, I had bravely invented the non-existence of my own camera and half-a-dozen used rolls of film. I was determined to see the thing through, despite the arrest and the impending customs examination. The films, restored to their pristine leadfoil and thinly disguised as obtrusive lipstick-holders, I disposed in the vanity bags carried by the lady members of the party. I hid the camera in the lining of my coat. All, happily, went well. I reached Peking with relief, my liberty, and my photographs.

That night we started all the wires buzzing between the Italian embassies in Peking, Tokyo, the new one in Hsingking (capital of Manchukuo), and the foreign office in Rome. Two days later our friend was released. But meanwhile he had been through some unpleasant experiences of third-degree methods, and had been half starved.

This sort of thing is liable to happen out there at any time. I was not in Russia or Japan now, but since the beginning of the war the Chinese had, I was told, been equally strict; and Yunnanfu was an important Japanese objective. I decided to take tentative risks.

With the camera in my pocket I sauntered, with an

innocent air, through the streets. The police could be distinguished by their uniforms of cheap, faded, dirty blue cotton and black peaked cap with its white band. There were not many, and I was soon able with impunity to attempt photographing the passers-by. To succeed was out of all question, since each man and woman appeared to regard my camera as a form of machine-gun, their knowledge of such engines having been recently inculcated when some Japanese bombers appeared above the city and, flying low over the main street, mowed down a large quantity of its human traffic. (A few hundreds were killed.) I had only to level the thing at anybody to compel him (or her) to bound violently to one side, giving me nasty looks the while. However, in the end I managed to bribe one or two human subjects with money, and I secured, gratis, a few views of the town.

It was not until over-confidence induced me to photograph a crowd reading a news bulletin that I was caught. It was in a sort of square, in the middle of which the traffic policeman seemed so busy at his job that I did not think he would notice me.

I mingled with the crowds around the notice-board. I took a photograph. I wound on the film and took another. I was on the point of taking a third when I was suddenly conscious of a violent jab in the back. Turning, I confronted one of the men in blue.

At moments of crisis such as this my mind—I do not know why—instantly and simultaneously takes prodigious leaps both into the past and future. That brilliant, neglected, misunderstood mathematician,

Mr. J. W. Dunne, would doubtless explain this on the theory that I consciously exist, for the moment, along the whole, or at any rate a part, of my allotted time track, that in a burst of self-revelation I perceive my complete four-dimensional being. Whatever the reason may be, the sensation is extraordinary. I am aware of being at once on a holiday in Switzerland, and detained in a Chinese prison, of gigantic picnics on a Devonshire moor, and at the same time of an obstinate refusal, because of my hunger strike, to eat a bowl of rice. The chains that now bind my emaciated body to a stone floor are confused, are one and the same—as in some tenuous and extravagant dream—with a necklace of blue beads that I am again playing with as a child. Drowning men are said to face the swift challenge of a resurgent past. At these times I am like, if you can imagine such a person, a sort of drowning clairvoyant.

So now, in a wild conjecture, I wondered if my youth had been sufficiently well spent to nullify the destructive term of imprisonment which my illegal activities would, I felt sure, compel me to undergo.

They deprived me of my camera ; one of them caught hold of my arm ; another thrust a sinister face to within an inch of my own. I shut my eyes. I resolved to Go Quietly.

But then an astonishing thing happened. Opening one eye, I perceived to appear on the face of the man who had taken the camera a slow, fatuous grin. Waving the thing at me in a manner at once menacing and friendly, he asked me—of all questions !—what it was.

The strange, the incredible truth dawned on me. *He did not know what it was. They had never seen a camera before in their lives.* They were ignorant, worthless people, like all the other fatheads in this God-forsaken hole. I began to feel an overwhelming disgust for the Chinese as a nation. I was frightfully annoyed. They had arrested me on no other warrant than the promptings of their insane curiosity.

I seized the camera, cursed them in an English which they did not understand, and walked away with all possible dignity. They made no attempt to follow me.

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On the next morning I interviewed one or two French business men and called on the British Consul-general, Mr. Davidson, who had been acting Consul-general in Shanghai after Sir John Brennan and before the present man, Sir Herbert Phillips, during a tricky period of the fighting in the August of 1937.

I asked him about the new road to Burma, which the outside world had understood to have been open for the past two or three months.

His answer surprised me. "Foreign newspapers," he said, "are under the impression that the road is not only finished but that munitions and supplies are coming in steadily and in fair quantities. In theory and officially the road *is* finished, but in fact several parts of it have suffered so severely from landslides that, except for very small vehicles, it is impassable."

"So that munitions are not coming in that way at all?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say that. They are coming, but on a much smaller scale than people imagine. There is also an alleged bus service from here to the Burma frontier. You will pass about twenty of these buses standing on a patch of grass on your way to the station. They are a bit old, but are reputed to run all right. In effect they haven't had a chance to try."

Mr. Davidson was right on this point (and I have no doubt on all others). Whatever may be the position with regard to this road to-day—and conditions are better—I had independent confirmation from several sources of its being at that time in very poor condition indeed. One or two people I met told me that they themselves had attempted to make the journey direct from Burma, but had at last been compelled to go through Indo-China and come up by the railway. It is a pity, I think, that the Burma Government, which subsidized the building of this road, did not foretell as early as did the Chinese the value of such a project, not only to China but to British trade, in the event of a blockade of the China coast which the capture of Canton did indeed make finally effective. It was Chinese initiative which began the road, and their work on it started as early as the beginning of the war. This was a remarkable example of military foresight.

"Are munitions coming up the railway?" I asked Mr. Davidson.

"Again on a very small scale. The French, as you know, have assured the Japanese that nothing of that nature is being accepted for transit. That is the

official position. The actual one is not very far short of it."

This was interesting. One or two people, unqualified to know, had given me the reverse view, but I do not think that they were correct. It was probable, therefore, that for arms traffic Yunnansfu was barely on the map at all. (I speak of December 1938 ; the position has undoubtedly been altered during succeeding months.) It seemed that the larger supplies of arms and munitions could come only from Russia. The taking of Canton was indeed a Japanese manœuvre of far-reaching effect.

Nevertheless--and for reasons which will, I hope, be apparent later in the book--Yunnansfu was not to be ignored. On the contrary it was destined to become, I believed, the most important Chinese city of the future.

CHAPTER NINE

INTERVIEW

The highest Chinese official in the city was, I found, a Mr. Wong. He was nothing very great. He was not even a member of the government. His official title was Delegate of the Foreign Affairs Department of the National Government, which had its offices in Chung-king ; and his authority was, to this extent, vicarious. However, I did not want to miss a chance to see him, and I managed, in the end, to get an interview.

Mr. Wong's office hours did not commence until one o'clock in the afternoon. They finished in the evening at about nine. This somewhat unorthodox period had been chosen with care, and for a very good reason. The strategic position of the town marked it as a most desirable objective for Japanese bombers, which had already paid it one or two visits ; but the surrounding mountains make it not easily accessible from the air ; and the nearest Japanese air-base was at that time an island south-west of Canton. In order that attacking 'planes might return to this base before dark, the town would have to be bombed in the morning. The Chinese who could afford it lived outside the city, and hence took very advisable care to remain there until the afternoon.

I had an appointment with Mr. Wong at five o'clock.

As I waited for him a brisk, spectacled young man sat down and said in very good English that Mr. Wong required a few minutes' notice of the questions which I desired to put to him. This person was the private secretary, Mr. Li. His presence was a little disconcerting ; I had planned to rely on Mr. Wong's general reactions to myself for a hint of what satisfaction I should get from him, and therefore of the sort of questions I would ask.

I replied in as vague a manner as I thought Mr. Li's intelligence, or rather lack of it, was able to digest. But this would not do. Mr. Wong, he said, was an extremely busy man ; he could spare me but a fraction of his time ; and it was important that I should phrase my questions in terms as concise as possible. Mr. Li—I had under-estimated his capacity for efficiency—gave me a searching look.

Well, Mr. Li, I answered, there was the matter of arms traffic, of food supplies, of the probable duration of the war. England—I grew expansive—England recognized the importance of Yunnanfu. She was China's friend. I was anxious to impart to her what information I could, in order that she might understand and know how to help. I told him that I was writing a book, that it would have a wide sale and would not be exported to Japan.

It was enough. Mr. Li was embarrassingly grateful. I followed up a tactical advantage. Did Mr. Wong speak English ? A smattering of French, did he ? Then it would be easier . . . could Mr. Li possibly . . . what I meant was that it was important for my

information to be correct, for no misunderstanding to cloud it.

Mr. Li quite understood. He would, he said, be only too pleased to interpret. He went out of the anteroom, and presently returned to conduct me into the presence of his principal.

Ushered into a well-lacquered room I was greeted by Mr. Wong with a thin, serious smile. He was of slight build, bald-headed : a sad, gentle little man of about fifty. He motioned me to a chair. My best line of approach, I thought, lay along the lines of the theme which had found me favour with the secretary. Unwilling to repeat myself—I had to address Mr. Li again—I decided to develop it.

The world, I intoned, looked with horror upon the bestial atrocities committed by the Japanese against her innocent victims. Great Britain, as he doubtless knew, was anxious to alleviate the sufferings of China, had indeed done so in a great many ways. She was willing to do more. But England, I said, was bewildered by, was hesitant because of, the conflicting reports of the war which were at present reaching her shores. Between stories published by Japanese official news agencies and those issued by the Chinese press lay discrepancies which, in the absence of guidance from independent witnesses, it was impossible to reconcile. I . . . was such a witness. My business it was to inform the British public of the true facts, without which the people of England could not perform their deeds of charity with a clear conscience and an impregnable faith in the rightness of China's cause.

To sum up—for I was anxious to forestall any signs of restlessness—what I wanted to hear from Mr. Wong was the Truth, unshaken by prejudice, not distorted by aims to intimidate the aggressors, and not suppressed by a desire to conceal some of their own failings.

When this—or some of it—had been transmitted to Mr. Wong he bowed several times in his seat, and attempted a few courtesies in French. He then begged me to proceed ; he would answer to the best of his ability.

I put my first question. And here, as nearly verbatim as I can make it from the notes I scribbled immediately afterwards, is the report of the interview which need not, from an informative point of view, be taken as seriously as it sounds.

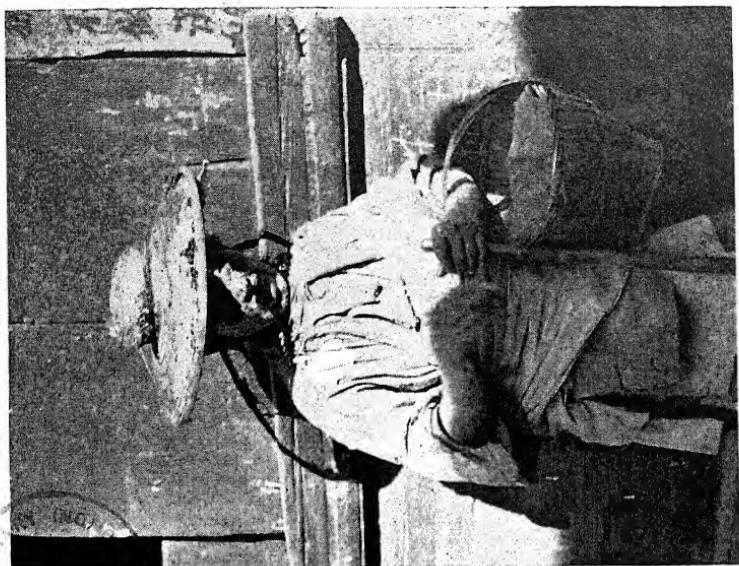
Myself : Since the Japanese occupation of Canton, problems have arisen in connection with supplies to China of arms, ammunition, food, mails, etc. Can Mr. Wong inform me by what routes these are now reaching his country ?

Mr. Wong : Arms and munitions are coming to China in great numbers from Russia, and also along the new road from Burma. Outside food supplies, letter-mails, the ordinary business of import and export—for the supply and continuance of these we are making use of the railway from Indo-China.

Myself : Is it true that, despite French assurances to Japan to the contrary, munitions are also being sent up on the railway ?

Mr. Wong (bitterly and emphatically) : No. The French are afraid of the Japanese. There is a story

"I MANAGED TO BRIBE THEM WITH MONEY"



"I MINGLED WITH THE CROWDS AROUND A
NOTICE-BOARD"



that, a few months ago, Japanese political agents secured some photographs of tanks and aerial bombs, destined for China, awaiting railway transportation on the wharves at Haiphong. These photographs were submitted to the French government through the Japanese Embassy in Paris ; they were accompanied by threats to occupy Hainan Island (near Haiphong), and to bomb the section of the railway lying in Chinese territory, unless the French government took steps to prevent the future transport of such machines. The ban was to extend to other munitions. After some deliberation, the French government gave that undertaking.

Myself : Is the Chinese government anything like ready to come to terms with the Japanese which will end the war ?

Mr. Wong : China will not entertain any theory of peace that fails to guarantee the complete sovereignty of her country.

Myself : Is that not going to be a little difficult to obtain now that the Japanese occupy and control so large a portion of her territory ?

Mr. Wong : China will compel the Japanese to evacuate her positions. The most that she will ever be willing to surrender for the sake of peace are the five provinces in the north, administered for the Japanese by the puppet Provisional Government of Peking.

Myself : Will the Japanese nation ever be content with so small a gain ? How could such a settlement be reconciled with the inevitable loss of face to Japan

which it would involve, and which she could perhaps never live down ?

But Mr. Wong did not know the answer to that question.

Myself : In the opinion of the Chinese government, for how much longer is the war likely to last ?

Mr. Wong : It is in the best interests of China to keep the war going for as long as possible. The Japanese are spending every day many more millions of dollars on their armies than we are. China possesses unlimited reserves of fighting men which her higher percentage of casualties will never reduce to a number inferior to that of the enemy. She has reserves of foreign currency sufficient to enable her to carry on the war in its present form for another two or three years. Her policy is to lead the Japanese on to bankruptcy.

Myself : Then in your government's opinion the end of the war is a very long way off ?

Mr. Wong : We hope so. That is the end at which we aim, and along some such lines of development lies the best possible hope for the salvation of China.

With that the interview concluded. I said good-bye to Mr. Wong ; but I shall always remember him. He was obviously sincere. In his troubled, compassionate eyes I had discerned an unswerving fealty to the land of his fathers ; and I thought that, to such as him, nothing short of an emergence from this conflict of an independent and unified China would provide that compensation for economic privations, for petty personal worries and fears, which alone could make their lives worth living. Patriotism, as a religion, as

a way of life, had superseded Confucianism ; but this patriotism, unlike that of the West, was in some manner an attempt to fulfil the saws of their great master ; for by his words their conduct was governed, and on his words they placed the interpretation that China would resist its enemies for ever. It is truer, perhaps, to say that Confucianism and patriotism were merged into one.

THE DRAGON WAITS

By this time I thought I had collected from various not profound sources information about the war in China which, added to my experience of having lived in the country for two years, gave me at least a flimsy pretext for attempting to assess a part of the political—and even perhaps economic—situation some of which may not be generally known. This book is not intended to be either politically or economically informative, and I claim to know little about politics and economics. If the reader, in scanning this chapter, will bear this in mind I hope to escape a charge of trying to instruct in a capacity for which I am far from being adequately equipped. The impressions here set down are admittedly fragmentary and empirical. They are coloured by my personal views. I ask only that they should be taken or left, as they stand.

The policy of Japan in China, which may briefly be defined as a military drive to compel China's economic dependence on Japan and national subordination to its imperialism, is largely conditioned in its intensity by political events in Europe. In view of many European economic interests in China, which the Japanese hope in the end to dissipate, this is not surprising. The political course of the war, so far as it has concerned

these interests, has up to date (the beginning of 1939) revealed all the characteristics of a game, if you can call it that, between cat and mouse. Japan pounces in China when the foreigners, who are the collective mouse, find themselves in a sticky position at home. To anyone who cares to take the trouble, it might be remunerative to draw up a kind of graph in which the varying degrees of political tension in Europe are plotted against the degree of Japanese aggression against foreign economic and, to a lesser and more psychological extent, imperial interests in China. The curves would, I think, be almost parallel. Points on them could be represented by, for instance (as Edgar Mowrer has pointed out), the diplomatic collapse of Britain over the Czechoslovakian issue, on the one curve, and the immediately subsequent occupation of Canton by the Japanese, on the other. The Munich agreement, while ensuring a temporary calm in Europe, showed Britain to be capable of yielding diplomatic ground and, as a consequence, of losing moral influence. If in Europe, the Japanese reasoned, then why not in China and in Canton, where a Japanese expeditionary force so close to Hong Kong threatened British prestige? But perhaps this is not a very good example. My intention was to show how Japan regulated her China policy by the tendencies to unsettlement in Europe. To choose a moment for aggression in China when European affairs were temporarily settled might seem anomalous. But the diplomatic factor is, to the Japanese, as much a symptom of the European barometer as are the political and

military factors ; and in this instance it overruled them.

The whole affair reverts, of course, to the Japanese defying of the League of Nations by its seizure of Manchuria in 1931. Thenceforward she needed to fear only individual nations instead of collective ones. With Russia exclusively concerned with internal adjustments and the challenge to her frontier in the west, with the proved uselessness of economic sanctions, and with the growing tension in European affairs, China—or some of it—could be annexed without serious foreign interference. Only the United States were free to stop the rot. Pledged to isolation, they showed their indifference to the war by renouncing, at its inception, all responsibility for their subjects in China, whom they advised to return home. (Their interest in it subsequently, and rather unaccountably, increased.) The failure of the Neutrality Act, on a verbal quibble, to stop the supply of arms to Japan emphasized this position and made Japan's task a good deal easier to carry out than if the Act had been enforced. Japan was in clover, and went ahead rapidly.

So much, then, for her general policy. The particular case of French Indo-China—and I emphasize it partly because this book is meant to be about Indo-China—is a curious one. There is, to begin with, the unusual factor of the railway, affording a type of situation in which France's place is unique among the foreign powers. Here you have a railway, running through the heart of an important Chinese province, a vital

factor in the war situation of to-day, and belonging to a neutral power. I am no war historian, but I will hazard that such a position has few precedents. An extraordinary state of affairs, it could only be met with extraordinary diplomacy.

France—poor France ! it has always been the same at home—fell at the beginning of the war between two stools. She was confronted with a dilemma. Should she, in view of her large but unprotected colony in the Far East, remain on friendly terms with Japan in the hope that Japan would recognize her interests and not interfere with them ? At first this policy seemed the safer, and in effecting it the French took care to restrict the volume of arms traffic reaching China by means of the railway. The only ones were of French manufacture, and these were allowed to go through on the plea to Japan that they fulfilled early orders for them by the Chinese government. The diplomatic bargain was sealed by Japan's agreement to respect the integrity of Indo-China and not to allow expeditionary forces to land on that part of the China Coast which lay close to its territory.

The agreement was effective only during the first few months of the war. It was then that France perceived the other side of the dilemma. If Japan was to conquer China she was headed, sooner or later, for a military occupation of Yunnan and for a consequent economic control over that province. Yunnan bordered on Indo-China. This achieved, she would have broken the spirit, if not the letter, of the original agreement, and the excuse to the French would have been that she

refused to allow anything to hamper her conquest of China.

Foreseeing such a course, France changed her tactics. Her sympathy turned to the Chinese. She equipped reinforcements to the Chinese Yunnan army, and opened the railway to the passage of arms of German, British, and, to a lesser extent, American origin. Japan countered with positive threats. If France persisted in this policy she would occupy Hainan, land her troops on the extreme south-west coast of China, and drop bombs on the railway as far as it extended into Chinese territory. Faced with this ultimatum, France turned to Great Britain. Great Britain uttered regret ; she could do nothing ; she had too many commitments already. Frightened, the French diplomatically retreated. They officially became, as nearly as possible, neutral.

But the French, in a quiet way, are cunning. All sorts of connivances with China passed behind the scenes. Suspicious, alert, and unhappy, the Japanese cat waited to pounce ; and when France was in the heat of a chase by Italian demands in Europe in the December and January of 1938-39, the cat saw its chance and took it. A Japanese expeditionary force landed on the island of Hainan in February. Thus was provided another instance of European events conditioning Japan's movement in China.

To turn nearer home, in June 1939 trouble arose between the British and the Japanese in Tientsin. Mainly due to the support given by British banks to the Chinese currency, anti-British feeling in Tientsin



had been increasing over the past year. The urgent need for finding a scapegoat for some recent field reverses, rather than any complementary event in Europe, was the probable immediate cause of the decision to blockade the British Concession at that particular moment. Britain was, of course, the scapegoat. (The ostensible cause, i.e. the failure of the British to hand over four Chinese assassins, was no more real than the incidents at Mukden and Lukuchiao were the real causes of the wars against China of 1931 and 1937.) At the same time, the Tientsin incident marked a very appreciable stiffening of the general Japanese attitude towards Great Britain, which would probably not have been achieved except during a state of extreme tension in Europe.

All these threats and diplomatic passes would have been avoided if China had been a free country, if when she had borrowed European capital in the past she had not been compelled to allot concessions of her territory to extortionate money-lenders. In this campaign Japan has run, and will continue to run, a pretty gauntlet of respect for international law. Up to the present she is unscathed. She will probably remain so unless, and until, she herself is forced to borrow money from abroad.

Amid the welter of foreign claims and prejudices in China, Japan has formed alliance with two powers whose demands it is in her interests to respect. In the case of Germany the alliance is of more academic

and moral, than practical, use. Germany, having been deprived of most of her claims on China after the Great War, could expect little gain from co-operating materially with Japan. A hint of the purely academic nature of this agreement was provided by the presence, only recently withdrawn, in China of German military advisers to the Chinese government—an anomaly as absurd as that of the United States selling arms to Japan to be used against their own interests in the Far East.

Japan's alliance with Italy has been more effective. Italy has a concession in Tientsin, provided by the Boxer Protocol of 1901, and substantial capital invested in Shanghai. Japan, to keep Italy's friendship, will respect these interests. It is significant that Italy has been the only country which has recognized the existence of Manchukuo to the extent of appointing an ambassador to its capital.

A small, but rather piquant, example of Italian sympathy with Japan was afforded by an incident in Shanghai during the November of 1938. The British contingent for the defence of her interests in the International Settlement had been halved, one regiment, on its way there, having been detained in Hong Kong during the September European crisis. The single battalion in Shanghai was, with difficulty, performing the duties of two. One sector of the Settlement perimeter was guarded by a detachment of Italian marines. The story runs—it was not more than a very loud rumour in Shanghai—that these marines, with the connivance of the Japanese army, were to

evacuate their positions on the perimeter without public warning and to return to Italy. Local British military authorities got wind of this move just before it took place, and were able to slip a few men of the single battalion into the vacated sector before the Japanese were able to occupy it. But it had been a close shave, if not in a particularly vital part, of the British face.

Japan, then, is fighting this war not only without material allies, but with a great many potential enemies outside China itself. Since only Japan is likely to benefit from her winning the war, this is as it should be. The fact that she receives nothing but the diplomatic and moral support of the only two other aggressive nations in the world, does not lighten her task.

Wars cost money. For how long can the two sides maintain this conflict by the present means of economic independence? What is the true value of their respective currencies, and how, if at all, can they be kept at a level sufficiently high to ensure the economical purchase of foreign war materials?

Japan has a managed currency. So, for that matter, has every other nation, at least to the extent that the exchange rate of its currency unit is not regulated by the specie points of its gold or silver standards, which have all been abandoned. But the value of the yen is, in addition, as artificial as are the values of the mark and the lira. Like those currencies, it is propped up by exchange restrictions at home. Its official exchange

rate with sterling is about one and twopence, but that is far above its true value in a free market. Japanese imports are—as they must be—paid for by exports; the slightly reduced export market and the armament purchases are offset by internal economies and a restriction on imports. Substitutes for inessential imports are being manufactured at home, as in Germany. The standard of living has been lowered; imports of luxuries like tobacco and whisky are prohibited altogether. In the cause of imperialistic expansion the Japanese public endures acute privations with a cheerful mien. On such a basis Japan can carry on the war for a long, perhaps an indefinite, period.

The Chinese currency position is hardly less impregnable. It is true that the Chinese dollar exchange rate, equal before to that of the yen, fell in 1938 to a level of eightpence and is now even lower. But here the stimulus which this has given to exports does much to counterbalance the higher exchange cost of armaments, while China, like Japan, is creating new (or rather reviving old) industries, such as hand-weaving for clothes, in a successful attempt to minimize imports for which, with her reduced purchasing power, she finds it difficult to pay.

The cause of the dollar's fall was a peculiar one. Japan paved the way by its formation in Peking of the Federal Reserve Bank, which issued notes in North China against an inadequate guarantee by the Yokohama Specie Bank. Foreign fear that the notes, by replacing those of the Bank of China, would achieve popularity among the Chinese and enable the Yoko-

hama Bank to secure large amounts of China's exchange reserves in place of them, proved to be groundless. The notes never found favour. But the fear was enough to force the Bank of China to place an embargo on the free purchase of foreign currencies. The dollar quickly, and unnecessarily—because the embargo itself was largely unnecessary—fell to little more than 50 per cent of its former value. (It must be realized that the embargo was essential at the time, in order to prevent the sale by the Japanese of Chinese currency. It was necessary in order to save the dollar; its imposition did not of itself indicate that the dollar was weakening and therefore the reason for the fall in its value was largely psychological, as were the reasons for its maintaining its value before.)

China's financial independence is involuntary; it has been thrust upon her by foreign refusal to grant her loans. But the dollar has been sustained at its present level largely by China's exports of silver. Taken up by the United States, these were paid for in U.S. dollars. A more effective reserve was thus created by replacing silver, whose value as a reserve depended upon its price, with foreign exchange. In March 1939 the British banks in the Far East announced a £5,000,000 credit to the Bank of China, to be used with an identical contribution by that bank as a nucleus for a reserve for exchange equalization. Still further factors contributing to the steadiness of the dollar are the large sums of foreign currency remitted to China by rich patriotic nationals living abroad, and the moral and physical support (they do not recognize the new

Japanese currency) given to it by British bankers and merchants in Tientsin and Shanghai. The latter is probably the strongest factor of all, and unless British policy in China undergoes a sudden change, the successful future of the dollar seems, for the time being, assured.

In the light of the foregoing currency facts and trends in Japan and China, both countries can afford to finance the war as at present waged for an indefinite, but probably a considerable, future period.

To what extent has the present campaign borne the fruits of economic benefit to Japan? How much more of China's trade, import and export, has she secured since the beginning of the war? Answers to these questions throw light on the extent to which Japan, from the point of view of industrial expansion, was justified in going to war with China. They throw, I think, a good deal of light.

I will consider, first, North China. For some time since the war started North China trade has been almost exclusively in the hands of Japan. In June 1938, for instance, 80 per cent of all North China imports were from Japan, and exports to Japan accounted for 70 per cent of its total exports. These figures are high. Even before the war, Japan had a good many fingers in the pie of North China trade. North China imports from Japan—to take an example—were smuggled in duty free with the help of the Japanese puppet administration dominating the eastern half of

the province of Hopei. Tientsin and Peking were not under this administration, but their customs officials lacked the co-operation of the National Government to put a stop to the smuggling which they were powerless to do themselves. After the war's beginning, the stoppage of the railway between Tientsin and Shanghai, the Japanese control of the South Manchuria Railway, and the activities of the Peking puppet government, all contributed to Japanese trade domination. This was achieved largely by the control of foreign channels of communication, by an import customs tariff favourable to Japanese goods, and by various laws wresting the export trade in wool, cotton, skins, and bristles from the foreign firms and putting it into Japanese hands. Foreign embassies did nothing to prevent this, and the foreign banks are at present fighting a losing battle in the north. North China is already a remunerative colony of Japan.

By the end of September 1938 China's total import trade with the whole world had dropped by 25 per cent since the beginning of the war, and export trade by 30 per cent. The proportion of British and American trade to the total foreign trade with China was at this date not very much less than before the war. An exception is the export trade with America which, largely diverted to Japan, fell from 31 per cent to 9 per cent of the total export trade. Japanese trade with China as a whole, therefore, must have suffered almost as much as the British and American trades; but Japanese imports from China, swelled by the former Chinese exports to America, have not suffered as much

if they have suffered at all. That Japan has not increased its trade with China apart from in the north is due entirely to the decrease in the total trade, accounted for by the war. But if the war were to end now, the increase in Japan's trade would not—you would say from the above figures—exceed the increase in other foreign trades. This, however, is not true, and for the reason that Japan is busy securing an almost complete monopoly of trade in the occupied areas.

As an example of this, take Hong Kong. The closing of other channels of foreign trade with China caused Hong Kong to enjoy an unprecedented, though ephemeral, boom. During the first six months of 1938, for instance, 45 per cent of all Chinese imports, *excluding those to the occupied areas*, passed through Hong Kong and Canton, compared with only 16 per cent for the whole country in the same period of 1937. Corresponding figures for exports were 43 per cent and 17 per cent. These two ports were thus of tremendous importance in helping to maintain the proportion of British and American trade to the whole.

With the fall of Canton, Hong Kong's prosperity abruptly ceased. British and American trade has now been diverted through Indo-China and Burma. The ways meet at Yunnansu, which has thus replaced Canton as a sort of clearing-house for Chinese imports from, and exports to, the outside world excluding Japan. But that the volume of British and American trade through Yunnansu will be less than it was through Hong Kong and Canton is painfully obvious, because

a great deal of Canton's former trade has been transferred to Japan. Canton's capture was thus not only a good military move, but it has tended perceptibly, and at the expense of other foreign trades, to improve Japan's total trade with China.

Lastly, let me consider briefly the present war policy of China.

One is tempted to ask, while on this subject, if China is fighting a losing battle. Which side, in other words, is winning the war? To put such a question is to pre-suppose, not only that Japan, the aggressor, has some definite goal in view, but also that China is fighting for some concrete thing which she wishes to preserve. But in fact one cannot do this. Japan has changed her ends as well as the means to them over and over again. China's policy has aimed simply at frustrating these ends. Thus the question put in its absolute form must remain unanswered because its meaning can only be relative.

Most evidence testifies to Japan's original purpose of dominating only the five northerly provinces of China, annexing them to Manchukuo which they adjoined. In effect, Chiang Kai-Shek thwarted this end by forcing Japan's hand in the south. In failing to expect resistance by the Central Government to the northerly annexation, Japan was guilty of a prodigious error of foresight. But the resistance, you will note, was not in the north but in the south—actually in Shanghai. Chiang Kai-Shek hoped, by a Shanghai

victory, to compensate for his loss of prestige in the north, and possibly to enable a counter-attack to be made there while Japan's resources were concentrated in the south.

The Chinese fought well in Shanghai, but not well enough. The city fell to the Japanese who, for better or worse, decided thenceforth to finish with China, to be content with nothing less than its complete conquest. In the meantime the Chinese had failed to recapture the lost territory in the north.

Japan's second policy went ahead by a series of field victories. Chiang Kai-Shek was forced—but not before his armies had blown up the dykes round the Yellow River—to abandon Hankow and the lower Yangtse valley and to retreat into the hilly west. Japan's advance was checked by the floods. In this breathing-space the Central Government organized its policy—the policy of, at all costs, prolonging the war for as long as possible.

A good many reasons justified this; two were paramount. First, organized guerilla tactics, both in the north (by the remnants of the former Red army) and behind the Japanese lines on the lower banks of the Yangtse, were causing an increase in Japanese fatalities. The margin of losses, hitherto greatly in Japan's favour, was considerably reduced. Chinese fatalities were still in excess, but China had so many men to spare that the new ratio, if maintained, tended to her ultimate benefit. Japan's bankruptcy, it was hoped, would extend to men as well as to money, which provided the second reason. Japan, as Mr. Wong had pointed

out, was spending on the war far more money than China. Given—for the purposes of argument—equal financial resources, simple arithmetic proved Japan to be sliding more quickly than China on the downhill slopes to economic collapse. A third reason was to be sought in Europe. A settlement in European affairs would enable Britain and perhaps France to throw decisive weight into Oriental scales already turned, by then, in China's favour—or so the Chinese hoped. Precedent for this was deduced from America's action in the Great War.

Briefly then, China's policy is one of "wait and see." If she is optimistic, it is not without reason. If for geographical reasons alone, I doubt whether a Japanese army will ever penetrate to the far, hilly provinces of Yunnan and Szechwan, the present strongholds of Chiang Kai-Shek. And this leader has gained a prestige among his countrymen that is perhaps greater even than those of Mussolini and Hitler among theirs. The spirit of nationalism in China is stronger to-day than ever before. If it remains so, if civil factions are subordinated to its cause, and if China's present policy is ruthlessly enforced to the end, then that end may be the ultimate triumph of this spirit even over a Japanese victory. In that event Japan might capture China, but she would never hold it. It is by no means certain that she will even capture it.

There remains, finally, the view of Japan. Her aim, as defined and promised to her public, is the complete subjugation of the whole of China. Even if this promise were not so hard to veil, so much has been

done to fulfil it that retreat with honour is now impossible. Japan, in my view, has been too grasping ; she should have been content with what she already had : the north and east of China.

Japan's interest in the country, as concocted for the Chinese public, is philanthropic. From the destruction of the ship of China, on rocks whose nature and even existence have never been clearly defined, she is the self-elected Saviour. To the Japanese the unconquered provinces in the west, compared to the ship itself, are but a ha'porth of tar. Unless the Japanese government, through its public, apprehends the danger, it may well be that in the attempt to save it the ship, for them, will be spoilt.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAREWELL, CHINA

I left Yunnanfu with regret. In it I had seen many memorable things : faces as much lined as Clapham Junction, marking the passage of years which their owners had long ago ceased to count, but which were probably very many indeed ; lovely temples, unkempt ; curious tobacco pipes of every conceivable shape, age, and size ; fierce extraordinary dogs with pedigrees as complicated as those of the Whig aristocracy in the late-eighteenth century ; quiet hills ; little dirty alleys that went twisting away behind mud-huts to end in a tiny yard full of black pigs, and chickens, and pock-marked little boys. I recall many and confused smells : of eucalyptus ; of joss-sticks ; of opium ; of burning charcoal and warm rice-cakes ; of inexorable decay seeping through old tapestries. . . . I hear the yelling of rickshaw coolies, the cries of hawkers, the harsh squeak of bows against cat-gut—like cacophonous bagpipes—and the creaking of a water-cart. I think often of one unforgettable scene : of nine children sitting on a log while a very old man and a very young child, using a double saw, tried with scant skill and unrewarded patience to bisect it. All these I left behind ; I took away nothing but a faint nostalgia. For Yunnanfu is an unusual, and therefore a likeable, city.

I had stayed too long. My only hope of returning to Haiphong in time to meet Frederico now lay in catching the Micheline, or petrol-driven rail-car, which got down to Laokay in twelve hours and connected with a night train to Hanoi. The Micheline's accommodation was limited ; when I reached the station the third class was already full. I took a seat in the first class. Rather than stand, I would pay the considerable difference in the fare.

It was half-past six in the morning : still a slight frost in the air. The engine, uttering loud but sporadic protests, showed a reluctance to come to terms with the elements of the kind shared by motor-cars on English winter mornings in the last decade. Between detonations we proceeded in jerks ; but we got away eventually and slid unevenly over the flat plain.

Presently the Chinese ticket-inspector advanced down the aisle. His job, until he reached me, was plain sailing, or rather punching. I was something of a problem. My—in two senses—illegal position, too much for the Chinese brain, proved to be also an uneven match for my own. True, I was travelling first class with a third-class ticket. On the face of it, the problem was simple enough : pay the difference and grin, cutting down on cigarettes, or wine, or going about with socks that had shrunk. The catch in such a problem, you would say, was limited to my capacity or otherwise for effecting these later, and urgent, economies. You would be wrong. Very wrong.

The root of the trouble was the custom, common and pleasing enough in most cases, of giving you double

value for less than double the price. My return ticket had cost me a considerably smaller sum than the charge for two single tickets. How much extra, therefore, ought I to pay?

But this is a mathematical problem which I prefer to leave to the reader. I reached about nine solutions, each one seeming about as good as any other. (But I had a sneaking suspicion that the most logical amount was the highest of all, i.e. the difference between the first-class single and half the third-class return fares.) The inspector, himself an arithmetical coward, sought my opinion and advice. He was very perplexed. I chose the smallest answer, gave him the money, and asked for an official receipt. For this contingency he was unprovided, and I forthwith took the money back. After all, I thought, why tempt the poor man's conscience when by paying the money to the ticket office at Laokay I could both ensure his self-respect and myself trace the money to its just destination? More perplexed than ever, incoherently mumbling, the inspector went away. Until we reached Laokay, I said, I will forget the matter. I was wrong.

To me the most memorable and quite the least important feature of that unimportant journey was the part played by a German sitting immediately behind me. He talked all the time and loudly, and though he never spoke figuratively into my ears, our respective positions were such that those organs were subjected to considerable strain. He talked with great pride, and in French.

Among other factors tending to restore a wan-

self-confidence is one's ability to speak a foreign language. Possessing it, you soar above all those of your fellows who are condemned to sole and perpetual utterance of their mother-tongue. There is about you a halo of romance ; you have lived abroad ; yours is the enviable sophistication of the traveller. Your deplorable ignorance of foreign exchange ; the fact that you know little of Irish politics and less of architecture or history ; your inability to distinguish Manet from Monet and to assign with certainty a quotation to Webster or to Marlowe—what are all these, you demand in order to raise your self-respect, against being able to make love in Russian or to tell a Frenchman or a Spaniard that the weather is improving, in other words against being able, as you fondly suppose, to cement the bonds of international friendship by the free exchange of ideas ?

They are everything against it, of course, because people seldom take the trouble to learn a foreign language but have it thrust upon them, usually as the child of necessity. It is most useful, it seems to me, in the presence of your family. A man is allowed none of his vanity, and few of his virtues, when he is at home ; but at least nothing shall deny the advantage of a language which his family cannot speak and he can. Naught but wonder and admiration are effective answers to being sworn at in an unknown tongue. The pity is that the family uses *your* skill for its own ends. Thus, "John speaks excellent Italian, you know," they manage to slip in when a neighbour comes to tea. But John is somehow made to feel that credit

for the half-dozen words or so that he has sweated to master in that tongue is due less to himself alone than to his accident of birth. "What else can you expect," is implied in the naïve confidence to the neighbour, "from the son of such a father, or of such a mother, or the brother of a girl who is"—they get this in too—"a bit of a German scholar?" It is far from being good enough; but the prudent son, thus ill-used, will say nothing about it. He understands human nature.

The German behind me—we come at last to my narrative—was one of those people who are so triumphant at knowing the foreign equivalent of words for their own sake that they cannot restrain a repetitive, boring and irrelevant use of them. They are like—if they only knew it—a groove in a gramophone record which without its context makes no sense at all, and from which the needle cannot escape. The German was a large, gesticulating person, and he gave to the above weakness the conceited twist of taking care, after his incursions into the Gallic tongue, to address a fellow-countryman in his own. This was, of course, to disprove the theory which might have been at large that he was French, his fluency in that language possibly having placed his other hearers under a misapprehension. The poor dupe! As if anyone, English or Chinese or what you will, could not see how he betrayed himself merely by uttering a single sentence in French.

He was an enviably pachydermatous man and to all appearances a slightly mad one. He was, as I say, a pastmaster in the art of irrelevant statement, a wizard of platitude. "In my garden in Germany are many

frogs," he would suddenly announce to a Frenchman in the carriage, not, however, because he thought the news worth imparting, but to show that he knew the French word for a frog. "They are not toads," he would add, roaring with laughter as if he had made a joke, but simply to prove that he could distinguish between a frog and a toad, even in French. He made elaborate and meaningless use of proverbs and similes, of terms which were colloquial only in French; and if he sometimes brought in a phrase which did have some bearing on his subject, it was often redundant and nearly always pedantic, flaunting only his power over the subjunctive. Listening to a piece of fantastic drivel, you could almost read the subsequent parenthetical thought: "Glad I've got that one in; it's a snorter." It was all very obvious and self-conscious, like the bragging of a precocious child. And if somebody in that carriage had said to him, "Have you had your hair cut?" I am convinced that he would have made some such reply as, "No, but the ink is in the sewing-machine of the pile-driver's grandmother." His was that kind of French.

His monologues beginning to pall, I sought distraction in the view from the window, and later turned to my book. It was while I was reading this that I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was the ticket-inspector again.

"What do you want?" I said.

He waved in reply a grubby piece of paper. Evidently, he had thought in his slow way, he was on to a good thing, if he handled it carefully. If he could

fake a receipt, then he could share the proceeds with whatever accomplice in the back of the car had helped him to think the matter out. The piece of paper bore suspicious-looking perforation at either end ; I thought I knew where it had come from. On it he had inscribed a receipt for thirty-four piastres and fifty cents. I refused to be the victim of such nefarious conduct. I told him again that I would pay the money at Laokay, to the ticket office. By this time the other passengers were darting at me unkind looks. "This Englishman," they seemed to say, "is a scoundrel" ; and I felt my country's reputation for debt-paying integrity to deteriorate. I outlined to them my plan in French, but I doubt if it was properly understood. With a dejected air, the inspector retired for the second time.

In many ways this journey was unaccountably odd. It seemed to possess a good deal of that strange fluid quality, it was impregnated with many of the shifting curious patterns, illogical and completely irreconcilable with any known reality, of dreams. There were, for example, those periods, perpetually recurring, when the car was stopped and the contents of innumerable tins of petrol were poured into the tank. Our route was, except for a few short stretches, downhill ; the brakes, though infrequently applied, were adequate for their job ; and there was consequently no need for our progress to be retarded by a dethrottled engine, which had in fact been turned off for most of the way. The object of all this petrol was, therefore, obscure.

Again, there was about our hurtling career something completely mad in itself. Or so it seemed to me. And

there exists, in what seems, a quality more persuasive, more subjectively compelling, than is sometimes to be found in what is. Doubtless my nerves were not quite in the state in which they should have been, though I cannot think why. I was reminded, for most of the way, of a trip which in my youth I had miraculously endured on one of the scenic railways in the Wembley Exhibition.

But what gave this journey a distinction of its own was the fact that the line afforded the principal, one might almost say the only, means of physical communication between one part of this province and another. The traffic was therefore not strictly limited to trains. Traders who could not afford to pay freight on their goods were wont to walk, carrying them to their destination along the permanent way ; villagers would use it for an afternoon stroll ; hunters sallied forth and returned along this route. On our way up, the slowness of our ascent, and the noise of the engine, had given clear warning to this ambulatory population of our approach ; one could be reasonably certain that they would hop safely to one side. Coming down was a very different story. The progress of our car, given no other impetus than gravity afforded, was silent as well as swift. True, we had a vociferous horn with which the driver made frequent play ; but it worked, I think, on the hydraulic principle : a few vital moments elapsed between the application and the result. Often, at great speed, we would turn a sharp corner—instead of, as you feared, plunging over the precipice—into a full and close view of perhaps a family

whose children appeared to be playing a kind of hide-and-seek on the line. Simultaneous application followed of brakes and horn, which worked after we had covered a hundred all-too-short yards. It was too late ; one shut one's eyes, listened for the screams and the crunch of bones. . . . But they never came. Yet another miracle had been performed.

Except for such avocations, the journey was boring enough. But I had not quite finished with the ticket-inspector. Far from giving up hope, he had devised an even more ambitious scheme for promoting his pecuniary gain. He returned, presently, with a slightly more decent piece of paper, a receipt for, not the thirty-four piastres and fifty cents of his previous demand, but the arrogant and audacious sum of sixty-five piastres and seventy cents. He explained, without apology, that previously he had made a mistake ; and he heard with equanimity my comment that that had been nothing to the grossness of this error. An extraordinary man.

We stopped to stretch our limbs and have lunch at Kai Yuen. I split a bottle of beer with the loquacious German, who numbered among his linguistic accomplishments a smattering of English. When we would have returned to our places in the Micheline it had disappeared ; gone, doubtless, to a filling-station. Curiosity impelled me, when it came back, to look under the chassis. From the bottom of the engine there issued a slow and steady trickle. The solution of the petrol mystery was only too clear.

I thought, at first, of sharing the secret of my

discovery with the driver ; but further consideration dissuaded me. Only a flash of inspiration, of such as I was convinced he was incapable, would have told him what was the matter ; that, granted him this, he would have sought a remedy was, I felt, beyond the verge of possibility.

Nightfall found us, slightly deaf and a good deal warmer from descending 7,000 feet in a day, at Laokay. I paid my excess fare. We abandoned the Micheline and had dinner—once again meeting the hotel proprietor—and then climbed into our sleepers for the night journey to Hanoi. This we reached at six the next morning. With a margin of a minute and a half I caught the early connection to Haiphong, and arrived there in time for breakfast. There was a chance that if the authorities at Pakhoi and Hoihow had been a little more alert at the approach of Frederico's ship than at the arrival of mine, he and Margot might have reached Haiphong a day early.

But they were not, I discovered, due until the following morning. After a needed hair cut I settled down to a little relaxation. In the afternoon, possibly, I would explore Haiphong.

FILMS

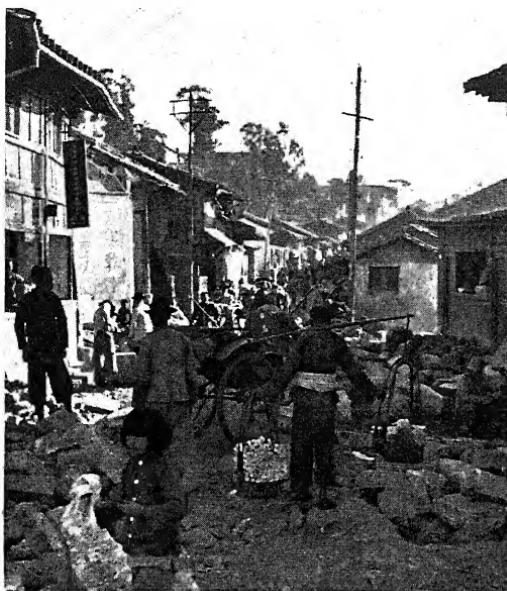
Until to-day, Haiphong had achieved a negligible fame among the seaports of the world. Now, the only gateway to China, it has had thrust upon it a notoriety and a load of business that are oddly belied by its appearance. Shipping companies, or their agents, which have offices in its quiet thoroughfares must lately have earned embarrassing profits and been kept pretty busy ; but in no conceivable way is this shown. It is true that prodigious piles of crates, few of which contain arms, can be seen on the wharves. But nobody seems inclined to move them ; and indeed the facilities for their transport to China beyond this point are limited. Many of these crates remain there for weeks ; and I had discovered that the small bunch of foreigners in Yunnanfu, which had to order its household stores from Hong Kong, was obliged to wait sometimes for two or three months before they arrived. But I found that in addition to the railway there existed a road of sorts which went a limited distance into the province, south-east of Yunnan, called Kwangsi. Along this, after a goodish probationary period of exposure to the elements of Haiphong, were driven most of the ambulance lorries that I had seen on my way in. I never found out how from there they

reached the upper Yangtse valley where most of the fighting was ; but I suppose there must have been serviceable tracks of some description.

The town itself is somewhat similar to any of the larger fishing villages on the French Mediterranean coast. The similarity extends to vegetation and climate, except that the Tonkinese summer is almost unbearably hot. Just now it was, of course, the middle of winter.

I felt very lazy on that day. I had left most of my luggage at the hotel where I had previously had lunch, and now I took a room there and spent the morning messing about with the luggage and doing a little half-hearted writing. In the afternoon I slept and I betook myself, after dinner, to one of the town's three cinemas. Two of these were showing Hollywood films with French dialogue ; the one I went to was not hybrid but pedigree French. Actors, director, scenario writers, cutters, stand-ins, supers—the entire celluloid family—were as French as a Camembert cheese and as unsatisfying to the spiritual palate as the cheese is delightful to the palate of a gourmet.

Not counting the one or two outstanding ones which had occasionally found their way to London, I had never before seen a French film. I saw one in Haiphong and another, a few weeks later, in Saigon. My experience of the less costly and less mature productions goes no further than this. Perhaps the two I saw were unrepresentative of what must be an output on a considerable scale, if the demand is to be satisfied of a public which perceives the deficiencies for them of a



STREET IN
YUNNANFU



"THE DIM SQUARE INTERIOR OF ITS SHOPS"

film made in a strange, though subsequently altered, language and appealing to other temperaments than their own. But the audience seemed pleased with them ; at least, therefore, they were not bad by French standards ; and this led me to a presumptuous appraisement of the general technique of French films, compared with those of Britain and America.

The first film was about a conventional engineer, happily but platonically married, who falls in love and runs away with a chorus-girl, abandoning his wife and his job. As a result, three lives are wrecked, and at the end of the film the chorus-girl, inartistically a prey to conscience, commits suicide. A tragic theme, it held in its presentation most of the elements of unconscious farce.

Apart from the script itself, which needed cutting, the technique was bad. The photography was poor, and the lighting atrocious. I do not mean that the pictures were dark as a whole ; they were sometimes too light. (Some of these effects may, I admit, have been caused by faulty mechanism in the cinema itself ; it was not a modern establishment.) And there was a scene in the chorus-girl's dingy room in Paris which took place by candle-light—because she could not afford to pay her bill for electricity—in which the faces were only spasmodically visible, owing to an advertisement light flashing on and off outside the window.

Now this sort of thing is all right in real life ; it is what actually happens. But the films do not generally reflect real life. They should do so, but in fact they

are wish-fulfilling ; they provide escape along the roads of vicarious adventure and romance. To be effective, real life on the screen, in the sense of reflection of the film-goer's own life, must be supremely well done. Escape, in such cases, is in the form of a truer perception of his own reality, opposed to the self-substitution, in the film-goer's mind, for the more romantic character on the screen. The film in question was of the latter variety ; the girl was beautiful and the man handsome ; like the illustrations to a magazine story it was on the side not of reality but of perfection, of reality as wanted. The faces of these people should have been always visible, in all the beauty of their flattered conflicting emotions. More candle-power should have been given to the candle ; any hint of reversion to ugliness, harsh shadows, and incompleteness, to the fly in life's ointment, should have been ruthlessly cut away. Personally I am tired of this sort of thing, and I liked the alternate light and shade. I am not easily fooled in the cinema. But nevertheless it was technically bad. I mention this fault at some length because it seemed to me to be typical of the complete picture.

On the whole the acting in this film was good. Histrionic bricks were conjured from directory straw, and I imagine that it was not the fault of the cast that the action was tediously slow. It may, indeed, have been the fault of the audience, many of whom were Tonkinese and might have preferred it that way. I believe that a much improved version of this film was shown in London ; there is clearly a wide divergence in

film tastes between the London and the Haiphong publics.

The other film was, I suppose, an intended farce. If it was representative, then it seems to me that the French idea of farce reveals itself almost wholly by repeated emphasis on what one may call the Embarrassing Situation. The high spots of this film occurred when a man had to simulate in public an unfeigned love for a girl because, through no fault of his own, he had been unwillingly forced to get engaged to her. This kind of thing is, of course, a well-known ingredient of farce, but when too much is added to the confection—as in this film—it is apt to become heavy, like a pudding without baking-powder. The audience, I noticed, suffered not the slightest indigestion from it. The French taste in farce is less subtle, as well as being a great deal more restrictive, than ours.

The cinema I went to in Haiphong was about half an hour's walk from my hotel. I would have preferred, when the film ended and I found myself in the street, to have drunk a glass of beer in the sensual and smoky atmosphere of *camaraderie* in a night club, so-called. Actually these places, of which there are dozens in every large town in the East, are dingy and rather sordid haunts which men visit unaccompanied by their girls. There is always a pitifully plaintive, usually a native, band which erratically plays tunes anything from one to three years old ; and disposed around the rim of the dancing-floor are enormous numbers of native girls wearing evening dresses of the Western style, on the mending of which they spend most of their free

hours because they have to make them last a long time. In China, but not in Indo-China which won't have them in the country, the ranks of these taxi-dancers are immensely swelled by the incursion of White Russian girls. Neither these nor the natives being professionally venal, they do however sometimes fall to the temptation of earning a little more than they require for bare existence. You pay to dance with them, and they receive a commission from their employers on individual proceeds. Thus they compete with each other, and since there are generally about six times as many girls as there are men who are willing to dance with them, the lot of the less successful among them is frequently hard. Haiphong—I do not know why—did not seem to have such places, and I returned on foot to the hotel and the consternation of a dozen rickshaw coolies.

The Indo-Chinese rickshaw coolie will recognize none but a singleness of purpose in every man who parades the streets alone at bed-time. He, or rather they, will trundle their contrivances in your wake for unlimited periods, furtively soliciting your custom for conveyance to where they are convinced you wish to go, and whither they will infallibly take you. Even if, having hired one, you do persuade the coolie to take you to your hotel he will only attribute to this your indifference to satisfying your lusts in a less clandestine manner than he has previously supposed. He will, in fact, drop you there, go away, and presently return with a "madame" whom he despatches, with the connivance of the hall porter, to your room. The

unexpected appearance of a strange, and usually revolting, female in your bedroom is apt, unless you know the trick, to cause you consternation.

All of which are reasons why, though not particularly wanting exercise, I walked back to the hotel. But I was followed for the entire distance by these impertunate coolies.

“QUO VADIS?”

Eight o'clock the next morning found me on the wharf. Having kept my promise I was not displeased with myself. Here I was, in time to meet the others, whose tiny ship had not yet appeared round the bend in the river. It was a lovely sunny morning, not yet hot, and as I went for a stroll I felt very happy in the thought of renewing friendship. Travelling alone is convenient and agreeable in many ways : you can go, unhurried or at speed, whither and by what roads you choose ; you may loiter or depart at will, without argument or bitter-sweet self-sacrifice. But it has many disadvantages, and in a country which does not speak your language the chief among these is your own appalling deficiency not only as a sole companion but as a man. Even the best of us—and I am certainly no better, but probably not much worse, than the average—have some flaw in their make-up. Forced back on our own resources, on perpetual self-communion, we are too often reminded of what social or business intercourse will help us to forget. After a fortnight of the former I was beginning to feel a very puny and vicious little microbe. I was anxious, apart from better reasons, to see Frederico again if only to be able to pick him psychically to pieces as well as myself.

Seeing people arrive, especially in this manner, is hardly less ludicrous, it seems to me, than seeing people off. It is true that the cry, redundantly repeated at one-minute intervals, of "the gangway's going up, they'll let you off soon now," is perhaps more appropriate, more suited to the conventional feelings of the moment, than the more hackneyed "you'll be off any minute now, the guard's getting ready to blow his whistle," uttered so often with ill-concealed joy. Either way, both parties desire the occasion to be over as quickly as possible; when it is one of arrival, an open manifestation of this desire is obviously more excusable on the grounds of etiquette than when it heralds departure.

Nevertheless, at both times and to both sides, the business is embarrassing. Facetious greetings, like facetious valedictions—perhaps the best camouflage of sentiments which it is desired at all costs to conceal—lose a good deal of effect when their essentially personal implications fall also upon the uncomprehending ears of a populace which is bound, in consequence, to consider you mentally deficient. The fact that, when a ship arrives, you have to shout them at the top of your voice merely adds physically exhausting insult to injury when both could have been avoided by silence. But this you cannot maintain. It is ridiculous, you say, to stand and do nothing. To do that, why bother to come at all? Well, for that matter, why?

Some such feelings offset my pleasurable anticipation as I watched the ship steam up-river and turn round

before berthing. For a moment they were so overwhelming that I thought of running to hide in the Customs and emerging, breathless, as the two arrivals came down the gangway. "Just in time," I would pant.

But I pulled myself together and thought of some feeble jokes.

I need not have done so ; they were not there. As the ship jockeyed, in its slow manner, for position on the quay I waved foolishly. There was no answering wave. Six or seven passengers stood on the deck, but Margot and Frederico were not among them.

Disillusionment has waited round so many corners of my journey through life that I have learnt to turn them with set teeth and clenched fists. Always prepared for the worse, I have nearly always met it. On this occasion, however, I had allowed myself the luxury of forestalling success. I had looked with favour upon the future ; it had let me down again ; and for once I was off my guard. Furthermore, there was now in my presence on that wharf a double fatuity. If the mere fact of meeting these people at all was absurd, then my coming under these conditions was a sinister jest beside which irony itself was one of Fate's least effective of tricks. I gave a hollow, but only inward, laugh. There was nothing complicated about any of this business ; Frederico had simply decided not to come shooting ; brief explanations, in the form of a telegram, would await me at the British Consulate. I walked away.

And then, suddenly, there they were. No, they

hadn't bothered to wave ; they had thought that I was still in Yunnanfu.

I was at once vexed and overjoyed. With strange, confused feelings, I took them back to the hotel. We drank coffee.

We discussed plans. Except that, sooner or later, we had to go right down the peninsula to Saigon in order to shoot big game, we had nothing definite in view. Myself, I preferred to stay a couple of days in Haiphong, partly to rest but chiefly in order to visit, forty miles away, the Bay of Along. This is a natural phenomenon, a collection of rocks of fantastic shape in the sea, which is very little known but is reputed to rival such widely divergent wonders as the Grand Canyon of Colorado, the Fjords of Norway, the Japan Inland Sea, and the Roads of Rio de Janeiro. "Everywhere," says a brochure, quaintly translated into English, "are found indented profiles, tunnels and circuses . . . and recesses where no wave will beat the rock. . . ." It sounded exciting.

The others, it appeared, wanted to see the Bay too. But Frederico had an equally potent urge to see the temples of Hué and the ruins of Angkor, to visit the distant province of Laos, to shoot a great many elephants and tigers, and to do all this in the mere space of four weeks which the extent of his leave allowed him to spend in Indo-China. Unable, obviously, to go to all these places, he could bring himself to exclude none of them. He was thus obliged to plan the most fantastic itineraries in all of which, at one time or another, he had to be in at least two

places at once. Margot, less ambitious, still showed a distressing preference for the jungle. Our plans, then, as discussed, went something like this :

Frederico (in triumph) : I have it. We stay here for two days, yes ? We visit the Bay of Along. We can hire a car, no ? We take this car to Hué and stay two more days. There are temples, very bee-ootiful, you know, that we must see there. Then we go to Angkor, what do you think ? From there we must go to Saigon for the shooting, no ? Because I have arranged for the baits for the tigers to be ready on the fifteenth. We must not be late. (With pride) : How is that, yes ? No ?

Margot : What about Laos ?

Frederico : Oh yes, we must not avoid Laos. I will go to Laos. You know, the people there are the happiest in the whole world. The girls are very bee-ootiful and not—what do you say—repressed ? They are very easily dronk and they have bee-ootiful eyes and they look at you with moch love with their pupils shining and grown big with the wine which is very cheap. I will go to Laos. . . .

(*Frederico* is carried away. Margot, of course, decides that wherever her fiancé goes he will not go to Laos.)

Myself (gloomily) : How long will all this take ?

Frederico (after swift calculation with pencil and paper) : We must allow for the travelling to and from. Altogether, about ten days. (This is cutting it pretty fine.)

Myself : And we go hunting on the fifteenth ?

Frederico : Yes. We must not be late, no ?

Myself (bewildered) : No. I mean yes. Do as you please, of course. Only to-day happens to be the twelfth.

Frederico : Oh, that is terrible. (Suddenly) : We cannot stay here. We must leave to-night.

Margot (petulantly) : I want to go to the Bay of Along.

Frederico (inspired) : We could go to-night, yes? (Overdoing it.) We could go yesterday. There is a moon, perhaps no. It would be very lovely, I think, and to-morrow morning we can get the car to Hué.

Margot : }
Myself : } No. I want to get some sleep.

Margot : Is it necessary to go to Hué? I don't want to go to Hué.

Frederico (piqued but undefeated) : I, alone, will visit Hué. I wish to see the temples. I wish to see also Laos, bee-ootiful Laos. I will go to Angkor. . . . I will see the Bay of Along. . . . I will shoot a beeg tiger. . . . (Suddenly standing up) : Come, we go now, yes? No?

Myself (wearily) : Wake me up when we get to the tigers. I'm going off in a long, long sleep.

And so on. What finally emerged from this absurd talk was that Saigon could be reached by train, and with a certain amount of luck, in two days. By car it would take nearly a week, and as we had to be there in three days this form of transport was out of the question. So, on both counts, was our trip to the Bay of Along. So, probably, was Hué, though we would pass through it on the main railway line to

Saigon. The Saigon train was due to leave Hanoi (I say this advisedly : it left on that day an hour later) at three o'clock every afternoon ; in order not to waste a day we must leave Haiphong that morning at twelve ; and even then it was doubtful if we would reach Saigon in good time for the hunting, because various indeterminate stretches of the main line were thought to be under water.

This last news sounded grave, but it was a contingency for which, in a country where the rains make an English thunderstorm look like a fine afternoon, the railway was well provided ; I gathered—for not even the officials at Hanoi knew much about a situation of which Haiphong was almost wholly ignorant—that we proceeded along certain stretches by a ferry of sorts, to other trains on the farther side of the floods. It seemed that this method of conveyance might compensate in comfort for what it lacked in speed, but this was of no use to those who, like us, were in a hurry.

Nevertheless, we went. We had to ; the only other way (excluding the much longer sea trip) was to fly ; and for this we had too much luggage and too little money.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SOUTHWARD BOUND

The train journey down the coast promised to be, if nothing else, hot. Hanoi is 22 degrees, Saigon 10 degrees, north of the Equator, and the difference in temperature is considerable. In a climate such as the Indo-Chinese it would be difficult to devise more uncongenial accommodation than the inside of a stuffy train.

But this train, to our delight, was not stuffy at all. Owned by the government, up-to-date, air-conditioned, it was clean and comfortable and it exhibited, on occasions, a surprising turn of speed. In a little place next to the w.c. you could stand, beautifully nude, under a shower which responded efficiently to a turn of the tap.

It was an unexciting journey. To many, perhaps most, of us the word train is synonymous with a certain type of romance—at least when it is a foreign train and you travel on it at night. It is madly exciting to watch the polished, curving rails, to see signals burning, crimson and green, and the black, unfamiliar landscape go flashing by, to feel snug and warm, like being in bed in a thunderstorm, against the background of stark and screaming elements outside. And there is that grand prospect of the morrow, of

dawn in a new land, with the accompanying sweet hint of the train's power to change, not only the objective world, but also, and because of it, the mood of the observer. New worlds ! New faces ! What greater tonic for a weary soul ? That is, I think, whatever the veneer of disillusion with which we may pretend to cover it, the general view. And I hope I shall not be accused of too much sophistication or travel snobbery if I admit that it left me, on that occasion, completely cold. The fact was, I was fed up with trains, sick of the sight and sound and feel of them. I had just spent the best part of a week on the beastly, quivering, jolting things. And besides, had I not, two years before, lived for twelve consecutive days and nights in trains, on the overland Siberian route to China ? Swung thus for 12,000 miles across two enormous continents, I had tasted all the romance that these frightful machines had to offer, and found it more bitter than sweet (due largely, I have no doubt, to the sluggish state of my liver following the lack of facilities for exercise on trains).

As I said, it was an unexciting journey. We shared the two capacious first-class carriages (not compartments, carriages) with only two other people. They were French, a man and a woman, and for some reason, chiefly I think because they preferred to be left alone, we never exchanged a word with them. They were a bizarre couple, flashily but not inelegantly dressed ; the woman had that rather wistful, synthetic look, saddening to behold, of someone who has once been very beautiful, and is growing old with reluctance.

We did not take much notice of them. But we saw them again in an unexpected setting.

The country beyond the window offered, on that first day, nothing new to me. Doubtless only because it was near the railway, it was all cultivated, all paddy fields, well irrigated, chiefly by hand, slowly and patiently with a bucket depending between two pieces of string and swung by boys from one trench to another. Water buffaloes, surely the filthiest creatures on earth, wallowed happily in the pink mud, pulling wooden ploughs with a complacent and leisurely air. Now and then a road would run parallel to the railway for some distance. The main roads are tarred as well as metalled, and they include the famous Mandarin Road, used thousands of years ago by royal couriers running 1,600 miles between the frontiers of China and Siam. These roads, though very narrow, are a pleasing contrast to the roads of China, which—when they exist at all, which is seldom—are little better than mud-tracks.

Along these roads, incidentally, there is run a fairly efficient service of motor-buses. These are of two kinds. Accidents are infrequent, but in an age in which no part of any highway is entirely free from danger there is perhaps a certain unconscious aptitude about the translation of these two kinds as “those owned by European undertakers, and those owned by native undertakers.”

At six o'clock it was dark. We pulled down the blinds and Frederico began to sing. He is a strong, forceful type of person and he has a strong, forceful

voice, a tenor of sorts. It was not a bad voice, but, like so many amateur singers, your bathroom baritones, he thought it a lot better than it was. It is only lack of training and application, these people appear to think, which has prevented them from becoming as good as Caruso, from being a second Gigli or McCormack. Frederico, in his attempted achievements, was even more ambitious than many others ; in his renderings of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody and Schubert's Serenade he insisted on emulating, at various stages, the sounds of a whole symphony orchestra. His imitations of the trombone and the bassoon recur to me as memories peculiarly vivid. Margot and I wallowed in the emotional surface waves of yellow-backed French novels, reading the ones which we reluctantly spared from a more practical use as missiles. Outside it began to rain.

We had dinner in a pleasant dining-car, also—though the food was non-poisonous and even good—run by an undertaker, this time a hotel company in Hanoi. In this place we managed to tackle the guard, from whom we were pleased to learn that on that very day the complete line to Saigon had been restored to commission. The train, accordingly, was due at Saigon at midday on the fourteenth.

This was a day earlier than we needed or had expected. The conclusion was obvious. At the frightful hour of five o'clock next morning we were due to reach Hué, which is the capital of the province of Annam. If we stayed there for twenty-four hours we could catch the same train on the following day

and be in Saigon on the fifteenth, as arranged with the hunting guides. Frederico was delighted.

I pointed out that it meant getting up at four o'clock in the morning on two successive days. But this, he said, was a consideration which, compared to all the bee-ootiful temples we should see, was nothing at all.

I said it was a good deal. And so, as a matter of fact, it was.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

HUÉ

We reached Hué two hours late. Day had already broken as, with the seven or eight rickshaws hired to convey ourselves and our luggage, we bowled along the mile or so from the station to the hotel.

It was raining. This is an under-statement. Say, rather, the skies were discharging a deluge, a cataract of water. It fell in huge, crowded, resilient drops which bounced up off the road and dissolved in a fetid steam. I have never seen such rain, or endured such insufferable, damp heat. In this weather it was impossible, even indoors, to keep dry, and one felt like nothing so much as a piece of well-masticated string. We all had splitting headaches.

We also had coffee and rolls, and then hired a car and drove off to see the sights. During the morning the rain stopped for an hour or two, and we walked about a little.

Hué is a kind of open-air museum. It shares with Peking, which on a small and inferior scale it somewhat resembles, the kind of attraction for the tourist which can only be properly felt with a guide-book, coupled with a taste for, and knowledge of, history. As I had none of these things, I shall not attempt to describe it as it should be described ; neither

would I be profane enough to do so, in my clumsy manner, even if I had them. The town itself is little more than a village ; its significance as a capital is mainly spiritual and political, and as a matter of fact the site was not chosen for practical reasons, but according to some magical principles of geomancy. Commerce it lacks, and this only adds to the quiet charm and dignity of its temples, palaces and tombs. These have the advantage over Peking of being set in surroundings of the utmost natural beauty, the beauty of mountains and luxurious vegetation. Through it all winds the River of the Perfumes—as lovely as its name—whose banks are lined with mango and palm trees, clumps of jasmine, scarlet flamboyants, and bushes of Japanese lilac.

None of the buildings is much more than a hundred years old. The Citadel itself, containing the Emperor's palace and the Purple Forbidden City, was completed in 1822. Annamese art is almost identical with Chinese : as a decoration to buildings it achieves effect mainly through the lavish use of gilt and lacquer, and the result of infinitely patient, and very beautiful, carving on jade, ivory and wood. We were shown the Emperor's palace, an immense and seemingly quite uninhabitable place, by a member of his personal bodyguard, a courteous Annamese who spoke excellent French. The present Emperor is an energetic young man, very wealthy like the Sultans of the Malay States, with a preference for France, where he went to school, and *le sport*. He was at present shooting big game, and his great popularity among his subjects

was proved when, three weeks later, his excessive zeal at this caused him to break a leg, and heaped upon him showers of sympathy.

Traditional tourists would have visited the royal tombs. We were not—at least I was not—traditional tourists. Anyway, it started to rain again, and the tombs were six miles away. We returned to the hotel, a place of vast, high rooms innocent of doors. Photographs hung on the sweating walls. One of these depicted a group of native girls. The girls were smiling. “*Jeune filles annamites*,” said the caption. I could not help thinking of Smith minor, that legendary perpetrator of howlers, who would almost certainly have translated this as “*animated young women*.[”]

Also on the walls were placards announcing the performance, in the hotel that evening, of songs and sketches by two Parisian artistes. These placards were accompanied by large and unmistakable portraits of the couple we had seen on the train. They were, it appeared, doing a professional tour of the country, and were going on to Saigon. Whether the tour was government-subsidized or not I do not know; but we saw them act, they were quite good. the seats were cheap, and the attendance here—as it must have been in Saigon and Hanoi—though it probably consisted of most of the French colony, was insufficient to show worth-while box-office returns. In this distant Parisian outpost it must have meant, and you could see that it did mean, a tremendous lot to the audience to see flesh and blood actors

from the Empire's capital. The French spectators that night—it was only a one-night show—numbered about fifty; nearly half were women. In such a place the men must nearly all have had government jobs of some sort. It surprised me—but I suppose only because I am English—that none of them took the trouble to dress for dinner on this auspicious occasion.

An amusing diversion was created—and in the interval before the evening show we needed an amusing diversion or two—by a young man behind the cash-desk who conceived an almost frightening passion for Margot. Without wishing to do her an injustice—she really is an attractive girl—I will admit that the poor fellow must have suffered a few repressions in that place, and that he acted with some excuse, if not justification. But he really was rather funny. He stared at her, his eyes popping out of his head, for minutes on end. She had told him—I think just to pull his leg—that she had mislaid her reading-glasses, and every ten minutes or so he would track her to whatever room she happened to be in, using the enquiry whether she had found them as a pretext for earnest and faintly suggestive conversation. Frederico and I were convulsed with suppressed giggles. During dinner he contrived to send her three notes, the contents of which, to Frederico's annoyance and my amused indifference, she refused to divulge. By the whole thing Margot was at once embarrassed and—for she was true woman—tickled to death.

The best proof of his allegiance was shown the next

morning. We paid our bills the night before, in order to save time for ourselves and trouble for the hotel's foreign staff by making them get out of bed at four o'clock. It was with some surprise, therefore, that we beheld the little man, his eyes round and adoring as ever, standing in the hotel lobby to bid farewell to this paragon of femininity. I think he would have come to the station had not Frederico, the possessive cave-man stirring within him at last, given him some pretty nasty looks and bundled Margot rapidly off in a rickshaw. It was still pouring with rain.

On the final stage of our journey we had the first-class portion of the train to ourselves. I spent most of it lying down, suffering from slight fever and lack of sleep. I scorned the dining-car and imbibed Vichy in prodigious quantities. When I had enough energy, I achieved a sitting posture and stared at the passing scenes.

The line ran for long stretches along the coast. The sea was calm, and the colour of pearl ; there hung over it a low mist. A quarter of a mile or so inland from the rocky coastline the shore was bordered by huge, thick forests of dark green, like the edge of an immense quilt. Strange coloured birds and black vultures flew above the scene. The sky was menacing. The land had a sinister, uncivilized look ; it was like a new country described from uncharted seas ; instinctively you searched for savages, yelling and herding on the beach with hostile spears. Green-carpeted mountains rose in the distance. Now and then we emerged from arbitrary, diffuse jungle growth

into the plotted ranks of a rubber or coffee plantation, the trees as neat as a line of guardsmen. Gone were the rice-fields, the unnumbered coolies, the stretches of open country. The land hereabouts was very different from that in the north.

Like most people, I sleep fitfully on trains ; and I am always upset when, having accustomed myself to the noise and rhythmic movement of the things to the extent of accepting them as accompaniments to sleep, I find that I have to readjust myself to the long periods of unnatural silence while the train waits in stations or sidings. Whether this is due to a sense of futility of being in a train at all unless it is actually going somewhere, or whether it is caused by my slowness of adjustment to a new order, I do not know. Whichever it is, I cannot sleep until we get under way again. On that night I do not think we stopped at all, and I was able to get the sleep which I badly needed. The next morning I was all right. We reached Saigon at midday.

It was hot and damp, though not actually raining. We had a lot to do : clothes to buy, and provisions, and to visit the bank. We were to leave again for the jungle on the next morning. In this clean, very modern city we chartered some bright, ingenious rickshaws which were both faster and more economical to the human propeller than the usual ones. They were a development of the principle found in the errand-boy's bicycle ; they had three wheels, and

while you occupied a comfortable front seat, the coolie sat and pedalled behind. We covered, in these, a good deal of ground.

Before dinner we sat on the terrace of the hotel and had well-earned drinks. There were no other English people there, but I ran into a group of four American post-graduate youths whom I had met a couple of months before while coming down the China coast from Tientsin to Shanghai. You meet, as a matter of fact, a good many of these young men in the East. They are the sons of fairly well-to-do, but not millionaire or even very rich, middle-class families, who are given a year's freedom and two or three hundred pounds by their fathers and told to go off and get some experience. Most of them go round the world, travelling second or third class and staying in cheap hotels. They are very cheery, wide-awake people, and with the Leicas and Contaxes which they always carry are sometimes able to earn a little money by sending photographs to *Life* or the *National Geographic Magazine*. Some of them even sell articles.

Such a method, peculiar to America, seems to me a very good one of completing one's education. The average young graduate of a university knows very little about life outside his own class and his own countrymen. Apart from tending to a better international understanding, the method of travel would appear to have several advantages, towards helping a man to decide what sort of a mark he is to make on the world and in what capacity he is to

make it, over the more general English way of dumping the youth, at a financial premium, in a chartered accountant's office or in a bank for a year or two. The first essential step towards success and happiness in life is the achievement of self-awareness. A man who has only just grown up nearly always finds this difficult. His task is certainly not lessened by the atmosphere of gloomy routine, stifling initiative, which pervades the average city office. Wild oats are much better sown quickly, and over a wide area, than distributed in a few local Saturday nights extending into those after-years when a man ought to be settling down.

We stood drinks to these young men. They were very gay and amusing, and had been up-country potting birds. They had come across the Pacific via Honolulu, Japan, and China. Next day they were off to Bangkok ; after that they planned a trip down the Malay Peninsula to Singapore, and from there to India and Europe, returning across the Atlantic to the States. Sometimes, they said, one or more of them would want to visit a place which the others did not ; then they would split up, and often get lost from each other, but always, and sometimes unexpectedly, meet again with much celebration.

Frederico, who is the most generous man I know, asked them to dine with us. As they were to depart early in the morning and had packing to do, they very sensibly refused. We parted. I remember them with pleasure, two dark and two fair, with their loud laughter and animated talk, their cameras and ill-

fitting clothes. They were full of self-confidence and curiosity.

After dinner we went to a cinema. There were several of these, one of them offering us Freddie Bartholomew in *Le Petit Lord Fontleroy* and another, *Deanna Et Ses Boys*, a somewhat liberal and coquettish translation of the title of the film, starring Deanna Durbin, called *A Hundred Men and a Girl*. We saw, in the end, the farcical film which I have already described. In the interval we were shown the trailer of a future presentation starring Wallace Beery. It is amusing enough to hear any American film star saying "O.K." and "*vous me dites*" with a faultless French accent (and the technique of this voice-substitution is so good that you are almost tricked into believing that it is they who say it). The Beery film was to be shown next week, and the temptation to hear this eminently American sample of large tender-hearted clumsiness talking perfect French throughout an entire evening was almost irresistible. I nearly had to defer my trip to the jungle.

But my thirst for a more strenuous experience prevailed, and at dawn the next day—for Margot's recalcitrant spirit endured to the end—we all entrained once more, this time for an unpopular destination but one which offered us, at least, the prospect of a temporary open-air life.

P A R T I I



Southern Annam

CHAPTER ONE

NO DANGER

The next ten chapters are devoted to an account of a big-game hunt undertaken by two amateurs, neither of whom had shot game of any description before. They are intended neither as a challenge to seasoned warriors of the jungle nor as a handbook for the fledgling, since it is obvious that an attempt at either would be both groundless and futile.

I am aware that big-game hunting, like fox-hunting, has many detractors. These chapters are not for them. Others, wishing to curdle their blood, may devour them avidly. They will do so in vain, and the chapters are not for them either. For the hesitant few that are left, the leaves are interspersed with details—at least having the uncommon merit of being accurate as well as candid—of scenes and activities observed, and of jungle tribes and our search for food, in a country which I believe to be little known to the average English or American reader. As such, they afford a distraction from the main theme. It is quite on the cards that the pages will be as dull as ditch-water ; if that is so, the reader has only himself to blame for reading them. As the road signs used to say, You Have Been Warned.

A lot of silly legends have grown up around big-

game hunting as a voluntary form of sport. Jilted lovers, disillusioned poets, atoning sinners are the sort of people whom the public imagines as being most likely to face the enormous personal hazards of the lion's den—the people whom conscience or malcontent has persuaded that it does not matter much whether they live or die. It is generally held to be an idiosyncratic hobby, like stamp-collecting or bird's-nesting. Shy, awkward young men you picture in the throes of feverish indecision between the alternative retreats of elephant-hunting and fretwork, shooting tigers and shooting-stars. Many of us think of Poona and puma as synonymous terms, and associate gouty colonels with both. Abnormal folk are alleged to be driven to jungle and desert by lack of imagination, foresight, and a sense of proportion ; like the ostriches they hunt, they have their heads in the sand.

Applied to life, these legends are, I think, the exception rather than the rule. The average big-game hunter is unlike any of these people. It is right that he should be unlike them, for the reason that his sport can be just as amusing as any other form of sport and is, generally speaking, no more risky than week-end motoring or week-end rugger. It is both arduous and exciting, and because it severs you completely from your fellow creatures, it is a superb end in itself. It is a good holiday in the complete sense of the word. Frederico and I, in short, got a tremendous amount of fun out of it.

One other—and by no means the least—reason

for the popular prejudice against big-game hunting is its high cost, in both time and money. East Africa is a long way from England; it has also set such prodigious prices on the heads of all its wild animals that it is able, at once, to make out of the pastime a well-paying invisible export and to restrict it to the rich. Hunting in Indo-China is absurdly cheap, but the place is thousands of miles from England. (It is at least as accessible from America as is East Africa, and of the very small number of sportsmen who go to Indo-China at all, the very large majority are Americans.) It is generally considered, both for abundance and variety of game, the best country in the world. So little, however, is known about it that I give below a short summary of the type of game to be found, and an estimate of the cost of hunting it; these may be of slight use to anyone having the desire, the leisure, and the money to go to Indo-China, but will probably be of no use whatever to anyone else.

Partly because it is one of the most difficult to obtain, the most precious trophy is the gaur—or, to use the Malay term, sladang. Usually more than six feet high, this creature is the largest of the bovine species. Its colour is pitch black, and its horns, unlike the long, curved antlers of the common bull, are short and thick and achieve an aspect of great strength. A majestic and sinister air, and one which invests the beast with a strange, almost sub-human appearance, is added by a thick ridge running from its withers to the middle of its back. Its colour combines with

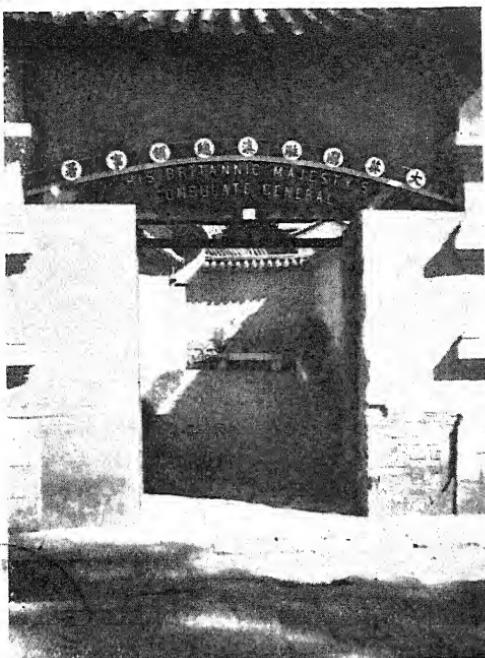
this hump to suggest, somehow, a hooded hunchback. Its bark, or at any rate its look, is a good deal more harmful than its bite ; unless wounded it will nearly always run away from you. Next to the elephant it is the most amusing beast to track.

A sort of small brother to the gaur is the banting, which, though it has longer horns and is reddish brown, has a similar hump. There is also the famous water-buffalo, though a virulent and contagious (but apparently exclusive) disease suddenly killed most of these in one year, and they are now difficult to find in their wild state.

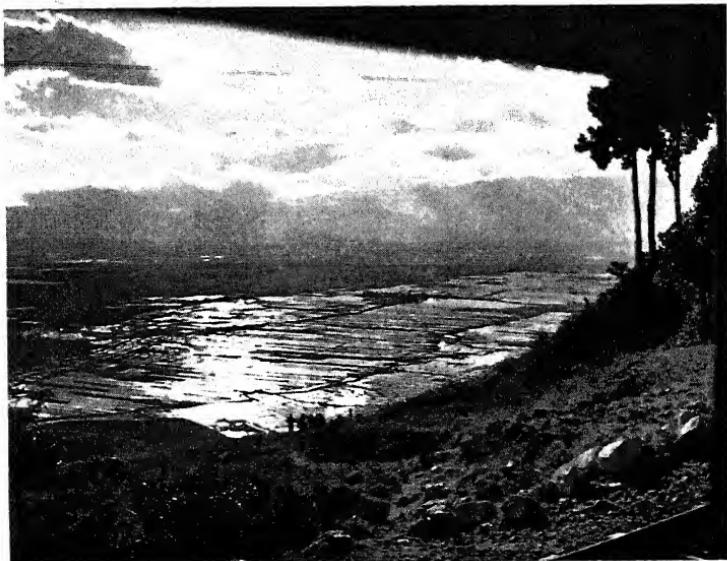
The foregoing animals are indigenous only to Asia, and are the least known to Europeans. In addition, there is any amount of commoner game, including elephant, tiger, tiger-cat, leopard (or panther), bear, rhinoceros (these are rare), crocodile, and almost every conceivable kind of deer, most of which is very good to eat.

The principal expense items are the guides' fees. The natives are forbidden to use arms, and in places where it is as easy for a stranger to get lost as in a maze, a "white hunter" is more or less essential. He in turn must employ coolies to carry food and equipment and to prepare camps, and must hire motor-cars or bullock waggons for purposes of transport.

Game licences and taxes, so heavy a drain on the budget elsewhere, are in Indo-China almost negligible. In Annam and Cochin-China, which are by far the best districts, a game licence costs 80 piastres, at present about £5. (This entitles you to shoot two



ENTRANCE
TO BRITISH
CONSULATE,
YUNNANFU



RICE FIELDS SEEN FROM THE TRAIN

elephants and far more of any other game than average luck is likely to yield in, say, a two months' *safari*.) Unlike East Africa, where the charge under this head is enormous, Indo-China imposes no additional tax per head of game killed.

The above expenditure is necessary and must form a basic minimum. In addition there is food, for which you pay anything you can and like. You can take champagne and caviare, and arrange to keep them both on ice. You can take a fleet of motor-cars or a platoon of personal servants, or both. You can, in short, run up a bill of £30 a day or more. Except that we had probably the best guides in the country, Frederico and I did the whole trip on more economical and primitive lines. We paid, each, about £3 a day. At a pinch, and with a larger party, it could be done for less.

Gun permits present no difficulty : they are easily procured on payment of a returnable deposit. The hiring of guns—if you do not bring your own—is academically impossible ; such business is barred by law. In fact it is the simplest thing in the world. Certain laws are easily evaded in any country, but never, I think, with such overt, tongue-in-the-cheek official connivance as this one. For the method of evasion is recommended in semi-official tourist publications. It consists of an arrangement by which you buy your gun on the condition that the vendor buys it back at a given later date and at an agreed price. The difference in price represents, of course, the cost of hire. Just why the government should permit

such spade-work provided it was done with an agricultural implement was never quite clear to me.

Neither Frederico nor myself possessed guns of our own. We did not want to buy any, and it happened that the hire-purchase market was very quiet at that moment. Too quiet; we were unable to hire any weapons at all. This seemed, at first, a grave and insuperable obstacle, and it was while we were suffering the final pangs of despair over this matter that there appeared, as if by magic, two charitable Frenchmen who offered to lend us their own indispensable adjuncts to a hunting expedition. They were not bad guns—a tolerably new .404 Mauser and a more ancient—indeed a very ancient—service rifle which had a calibre of only .315. (The latter was, however, of proved efficiency; it had already killed ninety-nine elephants.) In addition to these, the guides were able to lend us a twelve-bore single-barrelled shot-gun, and they had very good rifles of their own. On the whole we were, I think, adequately armed against most contingencies. Ammunition was plentiful.

I have hinted that the physical risk of big-game hunting is small. Its extent—at least, as far as it concerned us—may perhaps best be judged from the detailed descriptions which follow. But one factor may be illustrated here, as being helpful in expressing the mood of faint excitement with which we set forth. It consists of an extract, rather quaint, from an English-translated brochure on big-game hunting which came into my hands just before we started.

It says : “ A tiger that has been disabled by a wound, or too old to catch game easily, may at last, through pressure of hunger, turn to man and become a man-eater. He gets then very bold, and keeps on killing people with an appalling regularity.

“ Luckily,” it considerably adds, “ this seldom happens in Indo-China.”

We were grateful for this appendage.

HEADQUARTERS

During our stay of two days in Saigon we bought clothes and provisions and made final arrangements with the guides, who had been expecting us. At dawn on the morning of the third day we climbed into a smoky train ; by lunch-time we had reached our headquarters.

It was a village in the south of Annam, called Suoi-Kiet. It lay, a tiny oasis of a station and three bamboo huts, in the middle of a vast expanse of jungle. Stacks of timber were piled beside the permanent way which led, eventually, to Hanoi ; unconsciously, we had passed along it on our way down. A single but effective track, pushed thus through the forests, the railway was expensive to build. It is also expensive to maintain. Elephants in those parts have a predatory mania for uplifting long stretches of the line with their trunks and then, greatly satisfied, going quietly back into the jungle until the urge assails them once more. This involves the maintenance of vast preventive and curative squads of natives.

In one of the huts lived our two French guides. They were father and son, and their name, famous to all true big-game hunters, was Defossé. The father, a fine shot and one of the best guides in the world,

had lived in this jungle for thirty years. He had married an Annamese and raised a biggish family, of which Louis, the eldest son, had been born and—except for a period of schooling and military training served in Saigon—brought up in the jungle. Both of them hated Saigon, with its noise and lights ; when business or babies compelled either to visit the metropolis (preferred by both their wives) and each was reluctant to go, one of them consented only after acrimonious discussion. I got to know Louis well. Though he detested and seldom read the newspapers, he was well informed of, and held sensible views on, current international affairs. He was an interesting person.

We held a council during lunch. Keen to shoot a tiger, Frederico decided to move to a previously prepared camp ten miles away. With Margot and Louis's father he set out for this destination early in the afternoon on a bullock-waggon. I was to join them in three days. In the meantime I was to indulge in what was, I believed, one of the most thrilling sports in the world : hunting elephants. I would stay at the hut and make daily excursions in the immediate district, which was alleged to be full of them.

Suoi-Kiet possessed a road of sorts. It also possessed a piece of machinery for which the epithet motor-car, accurate in some earlier decade, had been changed by time into a euphemism. Louis and I commandeered this vehicle and, since it was too late to do any hunting on that day, drove unsteadily off to a neighbouring

village inhabited by Moys. These, the denizens (I am sorry, but tradition is precedent for this word) of the local jungle, are a mixed race which hunts, naturally, with the bow and arrow and chiefly subsists, despite this weapon, on rice. I could add, quite easily, that they carry rings in their noses and spears in their hands, and that to their primitive palates the flesh of the white man is a rare and peculiar delicacy. I daresay that with equal facility I could, in the following pages, delight and horrify the reader by plausible references to my being tied to a tree ringed by a dancing multitude of savages, while the pot was brought to the boil and Frederico arrived, to shoot the Big Chief, in the nick of time. To record all and more of this would be easy and, I regret to add, untrue as well as unromantic. Pledged to the truth, however dull, I must inform you that the Moys are the gentlest, kindest, most humorous folk in the world. They are, as I said, a mixed race. A wide divergence of customs and dialect among them is, however, offset by a universal excellence of beauty and physique, which is probably due to their ancestors having been early settlers from Polynesia. They are very likeable people.

It was hot. Not a human being was in sight. The village, unprotected by trees, shimmered beneath a blazing afternoon sun. On the dusty, grass-covered track were stretched two sleeping mongrels, round which flies indolently buzzed. A few huts, thatched with palm, stood on stilts at a height of about six feet above the ground ; beneath them emaciated

birds, distantly resembling chickens, pecked unrewardedly at the earth. A third mongrel, which appeared to be utterly without flesh, licked an incongruous empty tin. As a motive for conduct, hunger had driven out fatigue. . . .

I wanted—I do not know why, except that there was nothing else to do—to call on the headman of this village. He spoke French and was, Louis told me, the only Annamese among a population of a hundred or so of Moys. He formed some sort of link between the village and the native Annamese government. Of Indo-China's five states, four—Annam, Cambodia, Tonkin and Laos—are French protectorates ; Cochin-China (containing Saigon) is the only direct colony of France. All are self-governing ; each is presided over by a French Resident ; and the whole country is linked to France by the Governor-general, who officially lives at Hanoi. The French idea follows the British in Malaya. Cochin-China resembles the Straits Settlements, and the government and emperors of the other four provinces are similar to the government and sultans of the Federated Malay States. The British and French systems work well ; that of the United States—the Americans have, for instance, deprived the natives of all rights in Honolulu and the Philippines—does not.

We approached the headman's hut. A hideous apparition, in the shape of an old and toothless woman, told us that his lordship, her husband, was asleep. She offered to rouse him, and we agreed to wait.

We waited for half an hour. I did not object to

this ; naturally the visit of a white man to this village was a rare and important occasion demanding, on the part of the headman, a clean sackcloth and a careful toilet, all of which took up time.

At length the woman came back and vouchsafed a remark to Louis, who turned to me. "She says the old boy's in bed and refuses to get up for anybody."

I laughed ; but his independence astonished me and I felt rather foolish. After all, I might have had influence with the government, and my position did lack a certain dignity. The latter I partially restored by producing, and applying to my face with a mystic air, my camera. I photographed the children and departed.

Louis's explanation of this episode was that the old man had probably had a girl in his bed for some days, and that to get up and meet us, however much it met with his spiritual favour, lay far beyond his physical power. This sounded plausible enough. Such conduct was certainly excusable ; his wife offered the strongest case for polygamy that I know.

It was six o'clock, and already dark, when we reached Suoi-Kiet. I scrounged some beer from the station, and we drank it in Louis's hut.

The hut was a primitive, but oddly comfortable, home. The floor was of earth. Tiger-skins, rifles, and nineteenth-century photographs hung on walls lined with dried palm leaves. There was a smell of gun- and lamp-oil, and of dogs, and of old clothes. Two ponies tied up in a stall rattled their chains. In the yard a tame peacock flew from the roof to the

pergola over the gate-post with a loud rumour of wings ; on the pergola was spread a profuse growth of scarlet flamboyants.

Sitting in the yard, one was conscious of a strange, a paradoxical stillness. From a neighbouring tree came the combined perpetual noises of a cicada and an insect (I forgot its name), whose high squeak was like the hinges of a gate being for ever opened and shut. Somewhere in the jungle beyond the little station a group of Moys were tying palm leaves up into gigantic bundles ; as they worked they uttered an eerie confusion between a chant and a war-cry, and moved their bodies to its rhythm. But these chronic sounds emphasized rather than diminished the stillness ; upon their canvas, as it were, silence lay like some beautiful and tranquil picture. I smoked a pipe. It was very peaceful.

From the kitchen came the prosaic, but welcome, odour of soup. We sat down to supper and ate woodcock. Louis was tall, dark, very thin ; he had jet-black, curly hair ; and that night he was very talkative and told me hair-raising stories of jungle escapes. More than once, it appeared, he and his father had saved each other's life. I was duly impressed and hoped that, if the opportunity arose, he would save mine.

Soon, as we were to rise before dawn the next morning, we went to bed. The jungle is cool at nights ; I slept with two blankets and wore a pullover in addition to my pyjamas. In Saigon, if you have sense, you wear nothing at all and are not even covered by a sheet.

BOREDOM

The train was packed. Not a seat was vacant. I slept on the luggage-rack. The ticket inspector had entered my compartment and was demanding, as he always did, to see our driving licences. The meek compliance of the other passengers merely drove me to question his authority by the obvious method of ignoring it. I did not move.

Uproar in the train. Or was it a bus? The ticket inspector, to my fearful delight, had gone to summon the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, there was a full moon. . . .

The full moon began to float about in an extraordinary way. Someone was pulling me off the rack. It was the Home Secretary.

"Hey, wake up!"

I woke up. The moon, which turned out to be Louis's torch, shone for a moment on my watch. It was five o'clock.

In the chilly darkness I brushed my teeth, washed, put on boots and puttees. The stars, enormous close lamps, stood on their heads in a cloudless sky. Uniquely (for me) there shone at once, as plain as planets, the Great Bear and the Southern Cross.

We had a vast breakfast. Dawn swam suddenly

into the sky. Ridiculously small ponies, about the size of the Shetland breed, blinked at us in the yard ; we sat on them absurdly, like men on children's bicycles. (They were agony to ride, but they proved, in the subsequent undergrowth and long grass, indispensable.) With several attendants we moved off, crossed the railway line, and disappeared into the jungle.

For the whole of that and the next two days we hunted elephants. I shall never forget it. (Neither, I presume, will the elephants, since we are told as much.)

It is just possible (but not, I think, probable) that those stoical readers who have followed my narrative up to this point may have done so with a certain envy. Most people, after all, are travellers at heart. Envy and vicarious travel are, however, both bad. Had the reader been able, instead, to indulge his own complacency, to pity rather than envy my lot, to gloat over the misfortunes of another and cease to deprecate a fate which is concerned only with intensifying his own, he would have been both a better and a happier man. Up to now he has not (or perhaps he has ?) done these things ; I propose, in the next page or two, to give him ample opportunity to redress his failure, to restore, in short, his waning self-respect. I will summarize my first but, I regret to have to add, by no means my final impressions of how to hunt that large but elusive beast, the elephant.

On the whole the sport is amusing if you shoot

at, or even approach reasonably close to, your objective. The noise a herd makes, crashing through the silent undergrowth, is terrific and thrilling ; and there *is* a risk, usually small, that one of them may charge, if it sees you. (If it does charge, you climb a tree with alacrity, or dodge ; it can run only in a straight line.) To hunt them, then, is amusing under these conditions. Under any other, it is probably the most uncomfortable and boring occupation in the world. Alas, on nine days out of ten it is under any other, and the procedure never varies. I will describe it in detail.

You begin on ponies, if you can get them. (You can also start in cars, or on the backs of tame elephants. I know nothing of these methods.) Coolies carry your guns, food, and drink. Your object is to search for tracks, and after ten miles or so through pathways or long grass, it is evident that there are none at all. Not discouraged, yet, you dismount, take your rifle and your camera and plunge, face foremost, into a bush of thorns. Knowing that there is worse to come, you *think* the ensuing scratches into being a form of hallucination. A few hundred yards bring you into the jungle at its densest part. Trees, bushes, plants of every description, twine themselves round each other and you at an average height of four feet above the ground. The ground itself is covered with dead leaves, sticks, or grass, beneath which cunning camouflage stumps of wood, potholes, lumps of hard dung, afford modest obstacles to even the wariest footstep.

Through this virgin forest, then, you forge your

way. Perhaps it is eight in the morning—you have started at six—and it is still quite cool. Your temper is unruffled. Nevertheless you are wearing thick boots ; your heavy rifle, slung on your shoulder, reaches six inches above your head and you are already deplored your stature of six feet. When, every ten yards or so, you stoop, the rifle slips off your shoulder. You carry it in your hand, and it immediately becomes confused with a branch of brambles. The man in front of you has released a large and very elastic branch which he has pushed from his path. This springs back and knocks off your topi. You pick it up, and while you are doing so your camera has swung round and now beats against your stomach as you walk. You slide it back and fall headlong over an unseen log, losing once more, of course, your topi. This goes on for miles and miles. You are supposed to be looking for tracks (which are not there, anyway) ; you are much too busy trying to keep alive ; and in effect you are thanking God that your friends cannot see you and are striving desperately to achieve, for the benefit of the French guide, the easy nonchalant slouch, the unperturbed composure, even the sartorial perfection for which—happily on other occasions—the English are justly famous and justly proud.

At about ten it becomes really hot. Your hands and face are bleeding ; your boots are pinching you ; your left puttee is beginning to come undone. Sweat pours from you in a stream. Your khaki clothes are soaking and have turned dark brown.

You walk, altogether, perhaps fifteen miles. It is the worst kind of joke in the world. Only the thought—whose existence, you at last become convinced, is owed wholly to the wish—that you might suddenly find your quarry could possibly sustain you. When you reach home you have a heavy meal and fall instantly asleep.

Louis and I, as I have said, spent the first three days in pursuit of these creatures. We did so in vain, though on the first morning we caught several glimpses of a small herd at a range, considerably impeded with undergrowth, of about fifty yards. They were moving ; to shoot would have been futile.

Looking for, and following, the tracks is a scientific business. The jungle is, of course, full of them, some old and some new. The time when they were made can often be told with precision, by feeling the temperature of the dung and by closely examining torn or trampled branches. I, an amateur sleuth, was rather bad at this. Often, finding a piece of apparently fresh dung, I would hazard that we were getting warm, only to be told that the dung, on the contrary, was nearly cold and had therefore been deposited at least three hours ago. A branch which seemed to me already withered turned out to have been broken within the last twenty minutes. I was nearly always wrong.

Taken all round, these days were fairly exhausting. We rode or walked for nearly twelve hours on each of them ; for at least five of those hours it was pretty hot, though never, in the shaded jungle, as hot as I had expected. While hunting we ate nothing but

a piece of chocolate, a roll, and the contents of a tin of sardines. (We drank tea, not for its taste—this tea was foul—but because tea was reputed to discolour water only when the latter boiled ; to force the cook to make tea was to force him, *ipso facto*, to boil the water and thus to kill its potential germs—an act which his occasional bouts of lassitude might otherwise have urged him to omit.) Moreover, I was not in the best of health. The strenuous exercise must have affected, however slightly, an appendix wound that was only six weeks old ; I had been visited by intermittent but unserious bouts of fever ; and lastly, I should have welcomed some rest and sleep if only because thirteen out of my last fourteen nights I had spent in different, but always uncomfortable, places, some of them in trains, and my days had always been fully occupied since dawn.

Though I felt well enough, I decided that caution was the better part of stamina. A fourth day dedicated to rest and to moving unhurriedly to Frederico's camp would be, I felt sure, not unprofitable. I had not, it is true, got my elephant, but there would be time enough for that later. Our bag, to date, consisted humbly of two snakes, a biggish lizard, a small fish, and a turtle, which made delicious soup. (This was the last dish I had expected to consume in the jungle.) The other game was eaten, I have no doubt with relish, by the Moys.

TIGER

We slept late. After an unpunctual breakfast we set forth on the ponies ; food and equipment followed on a bullock-waggon.

The route to the camp lay partly along rough tracks and partly through grass ; scant trees afforded little shade ; and the journey soon proved to be a good deal hotter than any we had hitherto accomplished. Both our ponies were mares ; irrelevantly connecting them with two of the sisters of Haworth parsonage, I had christened them Charlotte and Emily. My mount, more temperamental than the other, was Emily. She ruminated a good deal on that morning ; she also ate so much grass that she swelled appreciably ; I felt rather as though I was seated on one of those pneumatic rubber beasts while it was being slowly inflated. Charlotte proceeded at a steady, phlegmatic pace ; Emily dragged. From time to time I secured a small branch and beat her ; she made a hollow sound, like a drum ; but the beating was effective, for she bounded forward at a violent speed, with a noise like a shaken hot-water bottle. These hare-brained dashes would gain her great if ephemeral advantage over the tortoise-like tactics of Charlotte ; complacently, Emily would

eat more grass. By such means we eventually reached the camp.

Margot, I found, had fulfilled her part of the bargain. During the past three days she had remained within a couple of hundred yards of the camp (partly, of course, for the excellent reason that she dared not go any further for fear of getting lost). She was, I noted with satisfaction, very bored ; but when I made the sensible suggestion that she should return to Saigon without delay, she answered rather rudely, in my opinion. A brave girl, she affirmed that she had never been so happy in her life ; each day, she declared, had been packed with exciting incident. She had, in fact, bathed once or twice and read countless novels. Pride is a peculiar thing. . . .

Frederico was waiting in a confined space and—so far—in vain for his tiger. He had been doing so for three days ; this was the fourth. Since, later on, I shall be describing my own efforts in a similar cause, I shall not here describe his ; suffice it to say that, after four days, they begin to pall. If, said Margot, he returned to-night without his trophy, I was to speak to him very tactfully.

I unpacked a bag and looked round. The camp was pitched under two trees on the edge of an open space of roughly two acres in size, and covered with tall grass. Two huts, primitive but effective, had been built by the Moys in a few hours with nothing but a hatchet or two, out of materials found exclusively on the site. The offices of nails and string, for instance, had been amply discharged by fibres of palm leaves,

which are as strong as wire ; and such gadgets as hooks, tables, chairs, even beds (though we had brought our own of these) could be ingeniously fashioned out of twigs, fibres, branches, and slices of bamboo. At a rough guess I should say that one of these huts, wholly weather-proof and adequately furnished for three people, would involve a total labour cost (nothing for materials) of about half-a-crown. Extraneous items would be restricted to mosquito-nets (indispensable), mattresses, pillows, wash-basins, and a shaving-mirror. You would need a water supply ; ours came from a stream at the opposite end of the meadow, about two hundred yards away.

Four of us—Margot, the two Defosses, and myself—had a light lunch off tinned beef and tea. After this, Margot expressed a sudden but fervent whim to ride Emily. She was not a bad horsewoman, and nobody—not counting Emily herself—had much objection to this. We saddled the lady, and Margot prepared to leap upon her with all the confidence of the experienced rider to paper-hunts in China. But Emily, thus disturbed in a placid midday meal and sensing, in her sub-equine manner, a strange and possibly hostile touch upon the piece of string which served the office of a rein, held an opposite view. She managed, in short, to forestall this manœuvre ; and by the time that Margot had swung a careless right foot over what should have been Emily's back, horse and potential rider had parted company. Horse was in fact proceeding at some speed in the direction of neighbouring mountains ;

potential rider was seated, in an unmaidenly attitude, on an inconsiderable pile of garbage.

During this interlude, Charlotte had been grazing. She was always allowed to do this untethered, being a docile creature and fond of home life. But the staidest of mares, as of men, likes to gad about occasionally, and at this point the example of Emily was not to be ignored or resisted. Charlotte, in short, at once bounded off in her wake, neighing in great excitement.

There now ensued a form of *Catch As Catch Can* between Emily and Charlotte, on one side, and Margot, the Defosses, about a dozen Moys, and myself, on the other. Abundance of cover for the mares exactly balanced a numerical advantage on our part ; on the whole, the sides could not have been more evenly matched. If, after a long period of successful hiding, victory would appear within grasp of the former protagonists, they would offer us a sporting chance by emerging, in a tantalizing way, into the open ; whereupon a policy of encirclement by the human powers would unexpectedly loom as a permanent threat to equine independence. Emily, cornered, or rather surrounded, would produce a look at once hunted and *Wuthering* ; while Charlotte, lacking initiative, waited with, as it were, an *Eyre* of expectancy, ready to acquiesce in any plan mooted by her more resourceful and tempestuous sister. In the end, majority ruled, morally at least : tired of the whole business, the recalcitrant mares quietly trotted back to the camp.

Swearingly undying allegiance both to her equestrian powers and to a determination to rule Emily if it meant breaking her own back, Margot made after the animal once more. I left her alone. I went off with Louis in search of banting.

The rains in Indo-China last from May till October. Although in December the dry season is well advanced, the Moys do not burn the grass, for some reason, until February. At the present moment it was very long, and for this reason Louis openly acknowledged our chances of seeing banting to be slim ; though we might, and did, follow their tracks, the grass precluded a view of them outside a range of fifty yards ; within that range they would probably run away. (We did not, as a matter of fact, see a single gaur or banting during the whole of the expedition.)

But that afternoon I took with me, besides the rifle, the shot-gun. I had taken it more or less by chance ; but it proved to be a lucky move, for as we were returning, empty-handed, for tea, a small boar ran directly but obliquely across our path, and grabbing the shot-gun I managed to shoot it in the back. Luckily I killed it, for these animals can be very dangerous when wounded. This one, a young and excessively filthy creature, had apparently wallowed for too long in the mud and been detached from its herd. It had long and ferocious tusks. The Moys carried it home. I was pleased about this ; I had made sure of having fresh and probably tender pork for, in two days' time, our Christmas dinner.

Back in the camp, Margot was walking with an

unorthodox gait, occasioned, it appeared, by her tussles with Emily, whom she had finally subdued to the extent of remaining on the animal's back during a prodigious burst of speed covering a hundred yards. Emily, though, had had the last word : she had discharged her burden into a bush of thorns.

I felt sorry for Margot, and admired her. She had shown plenty of spirit and was to reveal, presently, even more. Being assured by her that the bathing in these regions was peculiarly delightful, I accompanied her, after tea, to the stream. Without shoes or stockings, clad only in topis and bathing-dresses, we made our way through the long grass—an achievement on Margot's part for which, since the path was alleged to be beset with snakes of potent venom, I held her in further and considerable esteem. (I could hardly have done less than follow, with undeclared trepidation, her courageous example.)

The stream proved to be little more than ankle-deep, and it was very muddy. We essayed, with childish concentration, to increase its depth by building a dam with the aid of a large log, leaves, branches and pieces of bark. These efforts proving abortive, we sat sunning ourselves on the edge of the stream until dinner time.

At seven o'clock Frederico staggered back to the camp with Louis's father, who had gone with a lantern to fetch him. Fearful of his mood at first, we were soon reassured. He had shot his tiger and was in high spirits. We had a hilarious meal and toasted each other in cold tea. Later that night

the Moys brought the animal to the camp on the bullock-waggon. They waved kerosene flares with a fine, melodramatic air.

The tiger, a splendid male of more than average size, lay on fresh grass and was still warm. Magnificently striped and whiskered, it inspired, at once, hatred and respect. Blake's lines sprang irresistibly to my lips.

Its skin, Frederico declared, would embellish the Brazilian Legation in Peking. I could see no argument of diplomacy against this. As a symbol of the politics of to-day nothing, perhaps, could be more appropriate.

We went to bed.

LOST

Nothing so becomes a man, we are told, as having a Purpose in life. Nothing, in the present age, is so difficult for an honest man to have. In a world prostrate at the shrines of science, the state, homosexuality, sadism, the bombing aeroplane, mass-hypnotism, murder, and rape, the man who still retains some spark of civilized humanity may perhaps be forgiven for non-conformist, and therefore vagrant, tendencies. He may even be excused for going mad. No one, at least, can bear him a justifiable grudge for wanting, above all else, to shoot an elephant.

My purpose just now, the sole and ultimate reason for my existence, was to shoot an elephant. By all the canons of ambition and achievement it was—at least to my thinking at the time—an admirable purpose. I decided to allow nothing to stand between me and success. More, this Purpose was to me greater even than life; to achieve it I would flirt daringly with death. I did, more than once.

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The beginning was not auspicious. With Louis, the ponies, and five Moys, I was off next morning at dawn. Our objective, about fifteen miles away,

was a forest bordering the fair-sized Lagna River. The famous Lagna plain, which stretches for several miles on either side of this river and lies at the feet of high mountains, is a favourite haunt of elephants, which are compelled to pass through it on their way to drink in the river. The grass, however, was very long just now, between ten and twelve feet ; walking through it we could see nothing ; and to have attempted to hunt elephants in it was far too dangerous since they might have trampled on us and we could not, in any event, have run away. Our plan, then, was to track them in the neighbouring forest, where we hoped they were fairly numerous.

Four hours in the saddle brought us, suffering from cramp, to a village on the banks of the river. It was much more primitive than the last. It was almost a nudist colony. From the apparition of two white faces children fled in terror ; all the women, and many men, were much too shy to show themselves.

No further progress could be made without a canoe. Louis spoke several of the Moy dialects fluently, and since one old gentleman in this village owned a craft of sorts, he opened negotiations for its hire. These being concluded favourably for us, we left Emily and Charlotte to graze in charge of two of the Moys and proceeded, a complement of six carrying guns and food, to board the canoe.

The manœuvre required care. Built, I think, for a crew of not more than three, the vessel responded first by a violent rocking motion, and finally by settling down with its rim about half an inch above

the level of the river. We had before us a three-hour journey ; the slightest movement caused a prodigious influx of water ; to me it was only too obvious that nothing short of perpetual and agonizing immobility was compatible with our keeping afloat for but a fraction of this time. Immobility, however, palls ; in half an hour I sat in six inches of water which threatened to become, rapidly, a foot. Except myself, nobody seemed conscious of our impending precipitation ; I began to think I was dreaming. But at length, and at a moment admirably timed—we should have sunk, I am convinced, in less than two minutes—a Moy began to bale with a piece of coconut shell. We remained afloat, more or less, for the rest of the journey, which was made against a strong current by two inexhaustible paddlers.

At one o'clock and with relief—the midday sun's reflection from the water had made the last hour or two uncomfortably hot—we tied up to a tree on the edge of the forest. I dried my clothes. We ate and drank, and then set forth.

This jungle was, on the whole, less profuse than that in which we had hunted for the first three days. Palm trees, which by the wide, low canopy of their leaves had at once afforded more shade and required more effort to cut away, were absent from here. The trees, tall, massive and good for timber, grew close enough together to prevent our walking in a straight line ; but their branches were usually high enough for us to pass without stooping. Progress exacted less energy, in spite of a new and insidious

threat. This was young bamboo, in the shape of long, thin, firm but pliable shoots covered with small thorns designed, apparently, on the fish-hook principle. The worst of these was their unexpectedness ; deriving added scope from their great length, they traded on your air of assurance and relief ; so that, prepared to enjoy a period of respite after tedious but infrequent encounters with a bush or two, you were suddenly and unaccountably arrested, yards from anywhere, by a stabbing pain in the arm, or thigh, or face, against which any forward movement was impossible besides intensifying the agony. Removal of these things caused the flowing of both time and blood, and they tore your clothes to shreds. They were a confounded nuisance.

As usual, we walked and walked, and as usual, for all the evidence of wild elephants we saw, we might have been pacing the North Sea. Louis, goaded into a frenzy by my taunts and keenness, increased his stride. In what direction we went I did not know, since though the sun perpetually shone it was usually impossible to see it. I suspected—in doubt you always do, I believe—that we went round in circles. Every ten minutes or so we despatched one or two Moys up some trees. The speed and agility with which they mounted some fifty feet, often sliding along a high branch which you swore their weight would break, both astonished and frightened me. They went barefoot, and this helped ; they managed, with their hands and the soles of their feet, to get a purchase on the bark, and thus to climb, their bodies

at right angles to the trunk, until the lowest branch rendered their task comparatively simple. (Most of the Moys who accompanied us into the jungle wore what at some remote earlier time were shorts ; their legs were bare ; and before very long these portions of their anatomy were streaming with blood, which never seemed to worry them in the least.) They climbed the trees, of course, to get a view of the plain, in which it might just be possible to discern the backs, or uplifted trunks, of elephants who chanced to be fairly near. Alas, they reported failure time after time.

Three hours of this, and it was four o'clock and time to start back. Half an hour would suffice, against the three-hour journey up, to slip downstream to where we had left the ponies. It was four hours from there to the camp, but Louis knew the jungle too well to be confused by having to find his way in the dark.

We regained the canoe. The sun was still high. I felt that I had never been hotter, dirtier, and consequently more in need of a bathe, in my life. (I insisted, in any event, on taking off my clothes, preferring to sit in six inches of water in the nude rather than wear my trousers.)

But there was alleged danger from crocodiles. The river, large enough to contain many, was thought to harbour at least a few. During the trip up we had not seen a sign of one ; I suspected that the current was much too strong for them—a notion which, being wholly ignorant of both the habits and the

swimming powers of crocodiles, I was peculiarly ill qualified to entertain.

My clothes off, the temptation was not to be resisted. There is a limit to both human will-power and human sagacity. My desire, having gone so far, to go further precluded all thought of the evil consequences of my act. I was like a child who, over-ambitious at the discovery that he can walk, by overdoing it unconsciously incurs the risk of becoming bow-legged. (The main difference between me and the child was perhaps that I ran the risk of becoming one-legged.)

Preoccupation with crocodiles found me unprepared for a far more immediate and less apocryphal danger —the current. I dived into the opaque water and struck out for the opposite bank, only to discover that, like the shore from a departing ship, it was sliding irretrievably beyond me. I pursued a ludicrous course at an angle, from mid-stream, that would have brought me to the other side at a point about three miles away. It was an odd sensation. Unconscious of any force driving me past objects on the bank, I was faced with the only alternative conclusion that objects on the bank were, in some supernatural fashion, being driven past me. This conclusion being, for various reasons, untenable I was, figuratively speaking, at sea. Actually I was still in the river, with little prospect that I could discover of getting out of it.

I am held to be, among no other athletic virtues, a strong swimmer. The truth of this opinion, since I was going in the opposite to my intended direction,

was not in the least apparent. Dimly, with the merest fraction of a brain concentrating hard on other matters, I was aware that Louis and the Moys, who had refused to bathe, were convulsed with laughter. I suppose that, when you come to think of it, few things are more uproariously funny to a bystander than the spectacle of a man striving with all his might, unavailingly, against a swift current of water. A parallel between this and some earlier and similar predicament in the bystander's life produces in the latter a sense of affinity between the two people, as being joint victims of the idiosyncrasies of fate, which he manifests in full-blooded laughter. Besides this, the scene is symbolical, in a way that amuses, of the folly of all human endeavour ; it reminds you that we are, after all, here on sufferance and that if, for instance, the powers of darkness or light chose to arrest the globe in its diurnal roll, we should all go shooting absurdly off into space.

The adventure ended, as usual, in anti-climax. My feet, experimentally extended, suddenly came in contact with a bank of sand, a sort of submerged island in the middle of the river. I stood to regain my breath. Refusing to be rescued ignominiously in mid-stream by the canoe—such an attempt would have capsized it, anyway—I then exerted all my remaining energy in a final desperate swim which brought me, at last, to the opposite bank at a point about three hundred yards downstream. Here I was picked up and I lay, panting, in the canoe.

We returned, borne by the current, in fine style ; in half an hour we had reached the ponies. Ominous clouds had gathered. Louis told me, however, that it was not going to rain.

We started for the camp at a brisk pace ; in less than an hour it would be dark and the going would be slow ; anxious to be home, we essayed, while the light held, to cover as much distance as we could. We made good going ; the ponies were fresh after their long rest.

The journey was monotonous in itself and Louis, talkative enough over supper in the camp, was always pretty silent during the day. My thoughts, striving to be filled, turned towards England.

It was Christmas Eve. Manifold seasonal associations crowded into my mind : the possibility of snow and frost ; firesides ; family reunions ; overworked postmen, happy in the consciousness of service ; too much food ; too much drink ; charades ; ephemeral pledges of good-will ; sentimentality ; the toasts to absent friends. . . . These, for one year at least, were not for me. I was a long way from all of them, both in spirit and in fact. This jungle and my being in it somehow lent the festive occasion an incongruity deeper than the merely physical and superficial.

After all (I thought) what was Christmas ? Was it not, like the Jubilee or the Coronation or even the local fair, just an excuse to have a bit of fun ? The wireless has lately made of an English Christmas a national, rather than a religious, festival. But is it not, like everything else of its kind, an essentially

individual matter ? To point the difference between a Coronation and, say, a hockey club dinner is only too easy and too often wrong. For are not the feelings of the majority the same in both cases ? If those of the hockey player owe more to alcohol, it is because the settings of a Coronation are unreal enough without additional stimulus. Our behaviour, on both occasions, is identical : we shout and sing, pull down barriers of class and money ; we consciously exist, perhaps for the first time for months, as individuals. We cheer not so much the King, or the Empire, or humankind in general, as we cheer ourselves. For have we not broken, at last, the bonds of repression and fear, and managed in this brief interval of life to catch up on some of our past days of sleeping and dreaming ? It is as if, instead of watching life on a cinema screen, we had somehow contrived to get on to the screen ourselves.

Such seemed to me to be the spirit of Christmas, or the charm, at least, of paper hats and streamers and masks which lend it colour. It was only, of course, a half-truth. Even so, it was the half that in this jungle I felt I could very well do without. Hunting elephants, for all its drawbacks, was a way of living from which I stood in no need of a change in order to catch up on myself.

The trails through the jungle were very narrow ; we rode or walked always in single file ; Louis generally went in front, followed by the Moy with his gun, and then by me, with the rest of the Moys bringing up the rear. But to-night Emily was lazy,

and kept on stopping to eat grass ; I had somehow got left behind everybody else.

It had suddenly become dark. No rain fell, though the clouds which had previously gathered showed no signs of dispersing. Not a star could be seen ; the forest was pitch black. How Louis could discern the path, how the ponies managed at each step to find a foothold, I did not know and did not very much care ; I was tired, and though very hungry I had learnt that if, leading this kind of life, you do not have patience you might as well give it up. Louis sang, perhaps as unconscious proof of his being so sure of the route that he could afford to, perhaps as a deliberate means to conceal the fact that he was not sure at all. I did not know. But that we moved in any known direction at all was to me a miracle.

Reassurance to my sceptical regard for miracles was presently afforded by a tiny flame appearing in front of Louis. One of the Moys had lit his cigarette-lighter. This the small breeze frequently extinguished, but by its intermittent light Louis was no doubt able to recognize familiar trees, paths, clearings, which lined the way. Had our path been well worn, the magnitude of his feat would have been far less. It was not. It seemed to me to be entirely virgin. Louis had a compass, which he did not appear to use ; to steer by the invisible stars was, of course, impossible.

I do not know how the following incident happened. We were all pretty tired—especially the Moys, who



(*Above*) M. R. WITH TIGER

(*Below, left to right*) MARGOT, FREDERICO, MR. DEFOSSE,
LOUIS DEFOSSE

had not got the benefit of the rest from walking which the ponies gave to Louis and myself—and I daresay I had dozed off for a few minutes in the saddle. At any rate, I was suddenly aware of being quite alone and, since I could hear nothing, at a considerable distance from the others. Emily, worried, was beginning to frisk about in a scarcely controllable manner.

It had occurred to me once or twice during the past few days that between my present situation and a safe return to civilization Louis was the only link. To anyone the least bit unfamiliar with the jungle nothing is more simple in the world than getting lost in it ; I was a total stranger ; and this reflection therefore returned to me now with increased force. There was, of course, only one thing to do —keep still. To have attempted a move in any direction would have minimized my chances of discovery ; on the other hand, I could not have been more than a few miles from the camp, and the others had only to return along the known route to make sure of finding me. There was a remote chance, I decided, of the night being too dark for immediate success, of my having to wait until the morning. I suppose that in this prospect there was, which did not occur to me very forcibly, some element of danger : an old or disabled tiger might have considered me a suitable prey. Two means existed to forestall this : lighting a fire and climbing a tree. Neither, as a matter of fact, was feasible, since in the first place I had given Louis my matches and, in the second,

I should have been able neither to keep awake all night nor to remain up a tree while I was asleep.

I dismounted, stretched my aching limbs, and tied Emily to a tree. Then I sat on the ground and reviewed my position, as dispassionately as I could. It was not a very good one. I suffered both hunger and thirst, and had the means to satisfy neither. I was cold, and had no matches. (Emily had—tiny and sole consolation—a rug under her saddle.) I had a dozen rounds of ammunition, but no gun. My assets were few, my liabilities numerous. But the situation was vexing and uncomfortable rather than desperate ; I was impatient only for food and warmth. I was afraid of nothing, partly because there was little to fear, and partly for fear of being afraid. The best thing to do was listen, and for this reason, though cold, I sat still.

Hours passed, or what seemed to be hours. From time to time I shouted without avail. I wondered, for the hundredth time, how far the procession would have travelled before noticing my absence. Assuredly, not more than a mile or so ; they had had ample time to return. I concluded that, in this utter darkness, they had deemed it wise to proceed to the camp in order to fetch flares.

There was not a breath of wind. It was horribly quiet sitting there. The noise of a few cicadas ; the cries of birds and the occasional flutter of wings ; the breaking of a distant branch, a loud crack, by a neighbouring group of monkeys ; the flutter of a falling leaf or the soft scurry of a varanus, the giant

lizard, up the bark of a tree—these were the only sounds in a stillness which began to jar my nerves. I began almost to forecast, and certainly to exaggerate sounds ; the latter process made me jumpy. Once I could have sworn that two luminous eyes, like glow-worms, stared at me from a distance of a few yards. At that moment I nearly leapt out of my skin. Soon I could keep still no longer. Undoing Emily's girth, I removed the rug and carried it up a tree. Wrapping myself in the rug, and impervious to a fairly mixed bag of insects which it harboured, I found a tolerably comfortable seat in a fork between two branches. There, wide awake, I remained for a considerable period. It was an original way of spending Christmas Eve.

Though I wore a wrist-watch, I had had no light by which to read the time. This had made me furious, and I had afterwards toyed with the idea of feeling it by touching the hands. Abortive efforts to open the face with a penknife urged me to consider breaking the glass—a trick which for various reasons, but chiefly because I did not see what good it could do me, I at length decided to abandon.

I had missed the others at about seven o'clock. I judged it to be about two when I heard someone shouting. I bawled out something in reply. Presently lights flickered through the trees ; the creak of the bullock-waggon joined the chorus of shouting ; and in a minute or two the Defosses appeared, accompanied

by a retinue of Moys bearing flares. (Frederico had remained behind with Margot.)

Mutual relief preceded apologies and explanations. My absence had not been discovered until just before they had reached the camp. After a brief search on the spot they had decided, quite rightly, to go on to the camp and organize a proper search party. They praised, now, what they called my presence of mind in resisting the temptation to move. (I had not been tempted at all.) I ate a piece of chocolate, drank tea, and, since I was cold and greatly fatigued with Emily, walked home.

A hot supper awaited me, which I began at exactly midnight. My previous miscalculation of the time, by some five hours, may indicate in some degree the extent of my boredom, in addition to proving the frequent futility of marking the passage of time by means of a clock.

TIGER AGAIN

On the next morning, none the worse for my sojourn in the tree, I set off early and very soon found myself in another.

I did this with regret. I had no great desire to shoot a tiger—for that was what I was about to do—but since Frederico had decided to track elephants and it was not possible for the two of us to track them at the same time, it seemed as if I could do nothing else. It was only fair that he should be given a chance to shoot an elephant, but I concealed with difficulty my disappointment at this delay in fulfilling an ambition which failure had so far done anything but diminish.

There is only one real way—but there are a good many spurious ways—of shooting a tiger, and it requires a patience that invests the behaviour of Job, that much-tried man, with the intolerance of a spoilt child. This method consists in sitting in a cramped position for hours—Frederico had done it for days—in a kind of hut, designed to resemble a bush or a tree, and placed about fifteen yards from a dead buffalo, deer, or bullock, which is used as a decoy for your prey.

In this hut, known as a *boma*, you can read a book, or two or three books. (I took with me on that morning several of Margot's French novels.) You cannot,

however, do anything else. You cannot smoke, cough, sneeze, blow your nose or clear your throat ; you are a fool if you make the slightest noise while unwrapping the paper containing the chocolate and the roll which form your diet ; for if you do any of these things the tiger, who is far from being a fool himself, will immediately suspect your presence and keep away. Not another human being is within five miles of you. A few hours of this, and it is inevitable that you begin a self-inquisition of a kind calculated to discover the reason for your extraordinary vigil. And when I begin to do that the game, no matter what it may be, is invariably up.

Luckily for me, I did not have to wait long. I doubt if, for another reason, I could have done so. The reason is that I have a somewhat sensitive nose. Approaching the bait in the morning I was assailed, some time before being remotely aware of its imminence, by a smell reminiscent of a peculiarly certifiable gorgonzola, the kind for whose captivity strong chains and a padded room are indispensable requisites. Accompanying the smell was a noise like—I imagine—that made by the Niagara Falls. These things mystified me. Then, suddenly, I saw the bait. It was a dead buffalo. Above it, like the great pall that presages a storm, hung an immense, black, swimming cloud of flies. The tiger had eaten one haunch of the buffalo and the flies another. The latter sounded, now, like a vast swarm of bees round a hive. It was revolting, but the smell, I was credibly informed, was not unhealthy.

Sitting in the *boma*—there was barely room enough

to move—I began, with the Mauser by my side and poking through a small aperture, to read. Nothing happened. At eleven o'clock I ate some chocolate and drank a little tea. A kindly little breeze brought me, now and then, a fragment of odourless air, with which I prodigiously inflated my chest. The book began to pall, and my left leg to go to sleep ; hunger induced thoughts of turkey, Christmas pudding and mince pies, self-pity of the hollow mockery, for me, of Christmas Day ; and from a third and final reflection, that my presence in this place was entirely voluntary, I derived the uncomfortable knowledge that never had I felt such an insane ass in the whole of my life. A welcome relief from these embarrassing ideas came from the slow conviction that, sooner or later, I should have to make a move, however slight. Nature and convention having jointly decreed that a certain ritual must be performed in a particular manner at least once or twice in a day, I was faced with the problem of how to perform that ritual, from my regrettably high perch, in a way least likely to attract the attention of the tiger. The difficulties will be appreciated by the sympathetic reader ; let it be enough to say that, in the end, I successfully overcame them with small offence against convention and, against Nature, none at all.

My ultimate and, I think, just reward did not come until late in the evening. It was getting dark and, since I lacked a torch, not many minutes remained in which my continued presence could have been, in any sense, productive. Louis I expected to arrive at any moment to escort me home. I had abandoned hope

of success that evening, and it was therefore with surprise that I heard a rustling of leaves and the cracking of a branch or two.

I looked through the tiny aperture, and held my breath. Ten or twelve feet beneath me, walking slowly and with infinite caution round the bait, was a tiger. Smaller, I thought, than Frederico's, it was not less beautiful to look at ; a guilty feeling of sacrilege assailed me even as I was conscious of, in my nervous excitement, breathing in a manner calculated to make an erratic aim inevitable. The final master-stroke of irony would be administered to my position if, after sitting in this nonsensical fashion all day, I was to miss the brute ; this thought was amply sufficient to invest my feelings with the neurotic fear that I might prove a luckless pawn in the hands of fate. Perhaps—my mind was full of confused surmises at the time—the same thought inspired me with an ultimate calm. Whatever the reason, I succeeded, when the tiger finally stood facing me, growling fiercely and eating the bait, in shooting him fairly in the forehead. He leapt back, ran for about a dozen yards, and dropped, as I thought, stone dead. I aimed in the identical place, and shot him again, to make sure. He was dead all right. Half an hour later Louis and the Moys, who had heard the shots, appeared on the scene. I returned to the camp.

I was not, during the trip back, in the least elated. Shooting a tiger seemed to me to be the easiest thing

in the world, shooting an elephant the most difficult. On the unwarrantable assumption that the most difficult things to achieve in life are, for that reason, the best, and that the converse is equally true, the expedition to date had proved for me an obvious disappointment.

One problem, however, delightfully presented itself. It is a problem that confronts, sooner or later, all big-game hunters, and it concerns the skin of the tiger. It lies in the awful question : "What shall I do with it?" The proud but imprudent slayer takes it home and, all unconscious of his doom, pays a considerable sum to a taxidermist for stuffing the head. On the drawing-room floor of a house in some such altogether incongruous place as a London suburb, it echoes its first faint hint of mockery ; and everybody, cursing, trips over the head. A little anxiously, you search for a more suitable place to put it.

But alas, it will not go with any of the furniture in any of the rooms. Hung upon the wall, together with faded and frightful photographs, a few antlers (on which hangs a discarded trilby of your younger son) and a rifle or an assegai or two, it is too obtrusive. Draped on the banisters it is awful. Except at Christmas, when it affords at once an inspiration, and a useful piece of property, for Charades, it has no practical use whatever. Nobody will accept it as a present ; you cannot throw it away. From being the pride of your life, it has become its chief bane ; more, it haunts you wherever you go. It achieves, in a weird and astonishing way, corporeality. This ancient and

terrible skin, enfiladed at the last with moth- as well as bullet-holes, clothes the sickly and perpetual ghost of an adventure whose only conceivable justification was that it would be forgotten as soon as made. It is never forgotten. And not even its aura of napthalene, not all the old tennis-rackets, relics of fancy dresses, and shrunken flannel trousers which form its eventual stuffing, can change its imagined form ; let there be never so many strands of unstitched green baize lining, knotted into a depository for unlimited cricket balls and batting-pads—not these or anything else will usurp this bogey, which if it evades the garden bonfire will pursue its victim to the grave. No, there is only one thing to do with a dead tiger, and that is to leave it to the vultures, skin and all. But perhaps this is silly ; after all, there is quite a good market for tiger-skins. I decided, perhaps unwisely, to keep mine for the time being.

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Soon after I reached the camp, Frederico returned with Mr. Defosse. Convinced, after my vain and comprehensive efforts of the previous day, that the Lagna forests contained no elephants, I assumed as a matter of course that they had not seen any, and hardly took the trouble to confirm this by asking them. But it happened that they had seen a great number, about a hundred, and not in the plain either, but actually in the forest itself.

We sat down to a dinner of succulent roast pork—our first fresh meat for five days. Louis, for his failure

of the previous day, had his leg pulled by his usually saturnine father, who was to-night pleasantly jovial ; and we toasted each other in cold tea. On the whole, the meal was a success.

But not for me. For me it was a dismal failure. I was furious. The situation was more than unjust, it was devilish. After four days of abortive and excruciating toil I had seen—except for the small herd on the first morning—hardly a sign of even the existence of elephants. And yet here was Frederico, on the very threshold of his attempt, actually running into an army of them. That he had shot at one and missed was completely beside the point. (What was not beside the point, and what a stupendous egoism precluded me from seeing at the time, was that our respective fortunes with the tigers were exactly counterbalanced against the elephants. Fate, far from being—as I thought—unfairly bigoted, was in fact profoundly impartial and just.)

I was a long way from exuding, on that night, the air of good-will appropriate to Christmas.

DOMESTIC INTERLUDE

On the next day we hunted nothing. My request to be led forthwith to the vicinity of the elephants was met with the brief and ungratifying response that, after being so disturbed, they would have run away. But it was thought likely that they would return in a day or two.

So we remained in the camp. Frederico bathed in the morning, I wrote a few notes, and Margot took advantage of the Moys being temporarily in the camp to attend to their medicinal wants. Improvising a kind of surgery, she lined them all up and dealt with each in turn. The Moys know nothing about medicine and, a fatalistic race, do not care either. But, paradoxically and like the Chinese, they are superstitious, and if one of their number gets ill or dies they will kill a great number of chickens and pigs and indulge in riotous feasting, hoping by these—to me—inconsequent means to drive off the evil spirits. To watch the air of reluctance and scepticism with which they took Margot's pills and liquids was amusing. Kindly men, unwilling to foil her childish but obviously magnanimous desire to improve their health, they swallowed most of the stuff with a good enough grace. What did it matter provided that, as they knew, it had no effect at all ?



All went well until Margot, perceiving cuts and sores, suddenly began a lavish and indiscriminate application of iodine. It was an unfortunate move. This strange yellow stuff was quite different from anything else. It was poison. It inflicted, where no pain had been before, acutest torture. The toughest Moy writhed, beneath its deadly stain, in agony. What had been a harmless act of submission to a kind, if misapplied, gesture became all at once an unnecessary crucifixion in the cause of a silly and irrelevant whim. It was altogether too much to be borne ; the Moys rose, as one man, in inspired revolt, holding their injured parts and hopping all over the camp on one leg ; while the cook rushed into the nearest village to acquire propitiatory chickens. It was a touching scene. Only a long and involved explanation by Louis could finally persuade them that the end justified, in this instance, the exceedingly painful means. Reassured, they were still unconverted ; and probably, since they had successfully muddled through without antiseptics in the past, they were perfectly right.

Two of the men, however, were genuinely in need of attention. One of these I will describe in a moment ; the other had endured, for the past two days, a sharp attack of malaria. Margot had compelled this man, perhaps more out of pity than discretion, to swallow frequent and enormous doses of quinine. We none of us knew very much about quinine, but from a casual glance at the directions on the bottle it was fairly apparent that she had given him, far too often, at least three times the maximum dose. The man shivered

ominously, and Margot was frantic. In the end, however, he made a good recovery.

Of the Moys as a whole, one or two were memorable as individuals. Perhaps the most notable was the cook, for the reason that, having assimilated one or two words of French, he was the only one between whom and ourselves any form of direct communication was remotely possible. Misunderstandings with him were, however, frequent. He knew, and he knew that we knew that he knew, only two French words. These were *thé* and *sel*. So far as it was in his power to obey our commands, he needed only to equip himself with these two articles to supply our every want ; since, having asked him directly, we must require one or the other and nothing else, any attempt on his part to interpret our orders was naturally redundant. Thus he pestered us, throughout every meal, with loads of tea and salt when we wanted, perhaps, coffee and pepper, or pickles and mustard. He was always triumphant and anxious to please ; to disillusion him was often difficult and invariably agonizing.

At least four of the Moys—we had about fifteen altogether—accompanied Louis and myself on our excursions. They were always the same ones, and the best of the bunch was Daoh, a fine youth of about twenty who wore a battered grey felt hat from the morning of the first day till the evening of the last—not one of us ever saw him without it. His relations with this hat became proverbial, and we used them as an effective substitute for clichés. For instance, “Till death us do part” was changed to “Till Daoh

removes his hat" ; unlikely events occurred, we said, not "once in a blue moon" but "when Daoh went bareheaded" ; and so on. It was childish but amusing—amusing, that is, until we discovered something about him that suddenly lent our remarks a dreadful irony. For one day we heard him coughing. It was a pitiful, hellish cough, such as I hope never to hear again. It shook his heavy, powerful frame in terrible convulsions ; for half an hour he sat on the ground writhing in agony, his handsome boyish features twisted into a horrible shape ; he spat globules of blood. And all the time he wore his hat. . . .

Louis was devoted to him, the best Moy he had ever had. Nothing in the world would induce Daoh, though Louis was willing to pay all expenses, to go to a hospital in Saigon. Nothing would convince him that he was dying ; probably he would not have cared if anything had. I hope that when, very soon, he dies and is buried, the hat will go with him ; he would never be complete without it.

Another of our attendants much given to hat-wearing was a youth of about fifteen called Loh. He wore a cast-off khaki topi of Louis's which was about half a dozen sizes too small for him, so that, looking at him, your most frequent impression was of one of those rubber toys, depicting policemen or boys from Eton, that are sometimes hawked in the streets of London. He had great skill with the hatchet, with which he hewed down innumerable branches and palm leaves that lay across our path ; and it was always Loh who, greatly intrepid, slew the infrequent deadly

snakes and the harmless lizards and carried their mangled skin and flesh home slung across his hatchet.

Last, and most miraculous of all, was Baoh. He was little more than a baby ; Louis said he was thirteen. At first sight I mistook him for a girl, for he had the loveliest hair of black silk that fell on to his shoulders, and on his forehead a charming fringe. This pretty youth, with his feminine looks, had more stamina than many a full-grown man. Louis and I, though we were able by riding the ponies to rest for a good part of our journeys, were always dead beat in the evenings. Baoh, carrying an axe and a satchel of food, walked twenty miles a day through thick jungle on more than one occasion, and did it all without turning a hair. I was very astonished at his performances, but I suppose it is as natural for a Moy to walk all day in a jungle as for a male hippopotamus to fall in love with a female of his kind.

The most universal characteristics of these people were, I think, their vivid sense of humour and their keenness in our common cause of hunting. They were at once laughing and serious, full of a penetrating appreciation of our frequent strange predicaments—as when I was swept away by the current or one of their number fell from a tree—and yet kindly and profoundly conscientious when the occasion demanded. A curious and pleasing, though appropriately remote, intimacy grew up between white and black hunters. For were we not, after all, the only human beings in the world ? If not, it certainly felt as if we were.

AN ARABIAN NIGHT

I had to make a decision on that evening. Frederico, compelled to leave Indo-China in a few days on his way back to Peking, had decided to return with Margot on the next morning to Saigon. From there they would arrange to secure a car and go to Angkor. Would I like to go with them?

Now there were two very good reasons why I *should* have gone with them. The first of these was that, having already planned this book and decided that its subject was to be Indo-China, I had a duty, hitherto remotely fulfilled, towards the potential reader. Much of the book, I already knew, was not going to be about Indo-China but about China itself; the least I could do in my present position was to rush violently over those enormous expanses of the country which I had not visited and to cram a few hurried and superficial impressions into the still fewer pages that remained. That is what I ought to have done, and here was a golden opportunity to do at least some of it.

The second and—I fear—far more cogent reason why I should have accompanied them especially to Angkor was that to ninety-nine out of each of the very few hundred people who knew or wished to know anything about Indo-China at all, Angkor was

practically synonymous with the country itself ; the former was the *raison d'être* of the latter. This premiss is in a sense, regrettably true—regrettably because I did not go there, and in the sense that no genuine tourist would dream of going there for anything else. So far, therefore, as any reader is prepared to wade through this book solely on the off chance of finding in it a description of Angkor, to that extent I shall prove to be the guilty agent of disillusion in addition to being accused of masking under a false pretence.

To the latter accusation I can but return apologies. If I have misled anyone, it has been done as a deliberate act through fear of misleading of another kind. Lacking the historical knowledge and the architectural sense to appreciate such places as Angkor, I could not conceivably do justice to a description which, for that reason, I would rather not attempt. Since I must be guilty of error, I prefer it to be one of leaving out to one of falsely putting in. But this I can safely recommend : that those people who are excited by, for instance, Buddhist temples, Egyptian tombs, and the Pyramids, should on no account miss an opportunity to see the enormous relics of twelfth-century sculpture and towers, slowly being engulfed by inexorable jungle, which Angkor's famous ruins comprise. They are reputed to be, and of course are, very wonderful. I only wish that I could understand why.

Had I been able before now to kill an elephant, it is likely that I should have gone with the others at least as far as Saigon. I had arranged, as a matter of fact, to stay with some friends in Singapore and for this

purpose had booked a passage to that port on a ship leaving Saigon in two days' time. I sent, by Frederico, a letter of postponement to my friends and asked him to cancel the passage. At the same time Louis, who by now had entered into the spirit of my elephant-hunt as passionately as I, undertook most generously to defer a visit of himself to Saigon, and invited me to stay on for a few more days as his guest. This I accepted with alacrity, and although we had run out of provisions, bread could be sent by bearers from the station, and the jungle itself provided plenty of meat. Our plan was to move the depleted camp to the village on the Lagna River. We would thus be near the elephants and be able to dispense with the tedious daily journey of eight hours in the saddle between the village and our present camp. Mr. Defosse returned to Saigon with the others.

I saw them off with regret. They had been pleasant companions. Margot had displayed, in the total absence of feminine outlets, many and surprising masculine virtues. I remember only one occasion, her affair with Emily apart, on which potent evidence attested to her membership of the weaker sex ; it happened when, in discharging my rifle at a tree-trunk of conveniently gross dimensions, she was almost forced, by the recoil, into executing a backward somersault. As for Frederico he had, in somewhat inappropriate surroundings, exuded such consistent diplomatic courtesy, and such genuine sympathy and friendliness, as commended him not only for high ambassadorial honours but to myself as, I hope, a lasting friend. I

was, as it happened, to see them again before I left for England.

In the afternoon Louis and I rode to our new quarters. The village, at one time fecund, had suffered heavy losses from a recent epidemic. A falling had succeeded a rising birth-rate, and its reserves of pigs and chickens, following the frequent drain for purposes of sacrificial celebration, had been completely wiped out. What were the local laws concerning tribal immigrants I cannot say, but opportunities for colonizing this village seemed to me to be rife ; not the least consideration was that of living rent free in a rain-proof hut, there being many such that were both unowned and untenanted. Louis and I chose, of course, the best of these, and moved in our scant belongings. Several scorpions, by waving venomous and angry tails, showed their resentment at this unwarrantable intrusion on their rights ; and we stamped upon we thought, and I at least fervently hoped, was their full complement down to the youngest recruit. (The sting of a scorpion is not, as is widely imagined, fatal ; but it can make you very ill indeed. Luckily, we managed to evade it.) We then had supper. The boar I had shot was a small one ; its quality far exceeded its quantity as a food ; and there was none left. We fell back, with mingled reluctance and relief, on half a tin of beef that I had salvaged from the wreck of the last camp.

In our pantry was a disconcerting void ; something,

it was clear, must be shot without delay. We decided to take the shot-gun with us that night and go forth, in the bullock-waggon, in quest of a deer. Electric lamps attached to our foreheads would enable us to see clearly and to take, unhampered, the requisite aim.

At the last minute and—since it would have been impossible to use it effectually in the dark—purely as a matter of form, I decided to take the rifle as well as the shot-gun.

At ten o'clock we were ready. We were a comical pair. Each of us wore, for comfort's sake, a white towel on his head; secured to this by a strap we carried headlamps of the kind favoured by ear, nose, and throat specialists. Louis, though he was too tall, reminded me irresistibly of Lawrence of Arabia. On the whole, we looked like a sort of clinical mission to Mecca.

The bullock-waggon rumbled off. We sat side by side, rhythmically turning our heads, darting the long inquisitive fingers of our lights into the undergrowth. These roving beams combined with an encroaching pain in the neck to suggest the further confused imagery of our witnessing a match on the Centre Court at Wimbledon from the vantage point of a lighthouse. One could not help feeling, in these circumstances, rather idiotic.

A still greater element of fantasy entered these proceedings at about two hundred yards beyond the camp, when we suddenly confronted what was, in this remote corner of the world, one of the most anomalous sights

you could imagine : a man clothed from head to foot in spotless white ducks. There he stood, a guilty intruder, self-consciously caught in the arrested fangs of our searchlights, like some enemy bomber. He was a small, round, lugubrious man ; he looked Japanese, which by birth he afterwards proved to be. Two Moys stood behind him with suitcases.

Louis hailed him in French ; they appeared to know each other. Introduced to me as Mr. Matabee, he went on to inform Louis that he had come to call on him in a social way. For several reasons, this was no ordinary call ; obviously Mr. Matabee had not come all the way from Saigon to Suoi-Kiet by train, and through an additional twenty-five miles of dense jungle on foot, merely to deposit his visiting-card on our dining-room soap-box, have a drink of cold tea, and then go all the way back again. No, some ulterior motive was behind his visit, and a glance at the suitcases told me what it was. Mr. Matabee had come to stay. Rumour, which even in the jungle appeared to uphold its reputation of travelling fast in the East, had set him on Louis's track ; and now here he was. At this stage I began, most unforgivably, to roar with laughter. The dismal, surprised face of this fellow ; his white topi and immaculate collar and tie ; the thought of him, thus clothed, tramping all those miles in this sweating heat ; the further thought of our inconceivable hospitality in this village and of what he would do there—a sudden onset of all these breaking-up forces upon my self-control made me, for a moment, helpless with mirth. And then Mr. Matabee's leg, so obviously too

short in a double sense, seemed to me to offer irresistible material for pulling, in a single one. I formally invited him to be our guest.

"We shall be back in an hour or two," I added. "Make yourself at home. Ring the bell for a cocktail. The butler will get you a Turkish bath. Hope your bed'll be comfortable. Just ring if you want any more sheets or blankets or anything. Order a meal if you want one. Cold chicken and salad. Saddle of lamb. Anything you like. Hope you'll be all right. We'll be back soon."

Whether or not Mr. Matabee fully appreciated the fatuous irony of these remarks I do not know. At any rate he declined to accept the offer. He had brought, he said, his own mosquito-net and mattress. Not wishing to presume on our hospitality, he would solicit that of the headman, or of some other family. Apparently anxious not to dissuade him from this resolve, Louis commended it. Mr. Matabee went on his way, and we on ours.

Louis, silent as always while hunting, refused to vouchsafe any information about this extraordinary man, and we travelled for a boring and uncomfortable hour beneath a million stars and a new moon. The ground was very uneven and the axle, over which I happened to sit, was innocent of springs. Once or twice I felt as though every bone in my body must have been shattered. But I remained intact.

We had neither seen nor heard any signs of wild life. But then, suddenly, came the sound of a dog barking—a sound that was, you would say, mundane enough,

but in this almost ethereal place and atmosphere strangely incongruous and unfamiliar. Simultaneously Louis, to whom as being assuredly a far better shot than myself I had given the shot-gun, leapt out of the waggon, and disappeared, like quicksilver, into the undergrowth. Exactly what had urged him to perform this act I did not know.

But I soon found out. I caught a quick glimpse of what looked like a miniature kangaroo hopping over a clearing, involuntarily keeping within the radius of the beam from Louis's light, as a hare will run before the headlights of a car. And as it went it uttered the deep, fierce bark of an aroused watch-dog. Then Louis fired. The deer lay still. We waited a few moments and then turned him over ; he had been shot through the head. It was a tiny animal, reaching about eighteen inches from the withers to the front feet, and it had inconsiderable antlers. Reddish-brown on the back, the colour turned to yellow round the flanks and on the belly was pure white. Locally it is most often called a *chevreuil* ; I christened it a "barking deer," but this is not an original term. The main point about it was that the meat was considered excellent. We carried it to the waggon. Here was food for the next two days at least.

Except that the bullocks fell into a regrettable fit of laziness, reducing them at one stage to immobility for ten minutes, nothing happened on the way back. It was long past midnight as we came into the village. At this hour the place had an even more moribund aspect than usual ; not even the thunderous rumblings



CANOE



M.R. ON EMILY

of our wheels disturbed a single one of its sleeping population. Stiff and sore, I looked forward to the relative comfort of my hard but motionless slab of bamboo, softened imperceptibly by a mattress not more than an inch thick. We removed our headlamps, and the waggon jolted to a halt.

I had been half asleep, and suddenly I was wide awake. From the rear of the hut there issued the sound of what, in a metropolis, could confidently have been asserted was a road-drill working at full blast, but which in this unmechanized place could be nothing but a tiger growling. Furthermore, no other but a wounded or ancient beast, in short, a man-eater, would have ventured thus far within the orbit of human scent. I looked apprehensively at Louis, and he at me. Our hearts leapt. The Moys, unarmed, had scurried off in all directions like scared rabbits.

Cautiously, on tip-toe, we encircled the hut in opposite directions. In a state rapidly approaching panic, I held my gun as though it were a very heavy piece of knotted elastic spasmodically untwisting itself. At the back of the hut I met Louis, but no tiger. We listened. Mutually astonished, our faces told the same tale. *The tiger was not at the back of the hut, but in the hut itself.*

This was terrible. Or was it? At least the animal could not escape. With infinite caution, his gun cocked and levelled at his shoulder, Louis tip-toed to the entrance. I followed at the mean distance between the dictates of (1) discretion, and (2) the desire to be in at the kill.

There was a moment's breathless pause. Suddenly Louis burst out laughing.

"What the devil's the matter?" I cried, suddenly annoyed.

But he could only laugh. He could not, apparently, stop laughing. He had lowered his gun. I now presumed it safe to advance, and did so.

I should explain that my bed was really part of a raised section of the floor. On the long bamboo strips of which it was composed there was room for at least three other mattresses. I now beheld, depending from the ceiling at a kind of Knight's move from my own, an unfamiliar mosquito-net. Inside this I faintly discerned a confused shape, alternately rising and falling with a motion synchronized to the rhythmic growl which had now become nothing short of an uproar. Louis, recovering himself, opened the net and hurled through the aperture his pillow. The noise abruptly ceased. The shape sat up.

Mr. Matabee, I observed, had clearly decided to change his mind and accept my invitation. But whether he snored or not again during that night I did not know. So tired was I that I should not have woken up if he had.

MR. MATABEE

We saw little of our guest on the following morning. We started at the usual hour of dawn, and Mr. Matabee, whether or not because of exhaustion due to making all that noise I do not know, was not awake. From the beginning he had become, and until the end he remained, a quite unreal person to me ; I thought of him as a peculiar ghost, a harmless but vaguely irritating shadow. He would haunt me occasionally like a bad conscience ; indeed he was the direct cause of a disturbed conscience, since it occurred to me only at rare intervals that he was a terrestrial person and needed such things as food and drink, and in my infrequent offers of these I was guilty of being, quite unintentionally, a bad host.

Nothing exciting happened on our hunt that day. We were reassured, it is true, by distant trumpetings and swishing sounds, which proved that the elephants had not run very far away. Though we did not see them, we were able to return with the comforting thought that subsequent excursions need not necessarily prove abortive. I should have mentioned before now that in hunting elephants you are very much at the mercy of a particular form of chance—the direction of the wind. There was never, as a matter of fact,

enough wind for its quarter to be at all perceptible to us, at least without the aid of the spurious, but effective, vanes afforded by cigarette-smoke. But on this apparent stillness there was always borne sufficient air to carry our scent to the peculiarly sensitive organs of elephants. Elephants, therefore, who were to windward of us we never had a chance to shoot, since they took good care to keep a long distance away from us. Up to now we had, I suppose, always been to leeward of elephants.

The only incident worth recording occurred on our way up-river in the morning. Rounding a bend, we suddenly came in sight of about a score of peacocks perched in the boughs of a tall tree on the bank. We ran the canoe into the grass on the opposite side, and I took a pot shot at one of them with the rifle. It was a long shot in the figurative as well as the literal sense, and its only effect was to put them all to flight, with their garish plumes reflecting the sunrise in a picture of peculiar beauty.

When we returned it was to find that Mr. Matabee, about whom I had forgotten, had already made inroads upon the deer. I did not resent this in the least (the man had to eat) ; and when he offered us in exchange such delicacies as dates, oranges, and bananas, I was ready to continue the bartering process further. Though fruit, of course, abounded in every part of the jungle, at the moment it was out of season and for days I had yearned to quench my thirst with orange-juice, as a change from the insipid water and the foul tea. (Lately I had become profoundly sick of tea.

Lacking—rather unwisely, I think, as it turned out afterwards—the conscientiousness of the cook, I now drank plain water, reputed to have been boiled. It was very soft and unpalatable stuff. For me it had, as the waters of Bath once had for Samuel Weller, “a very strong flavour o’ warm flat irons.”)

I will now attempt a description of Mr. Matabee, and if the only impression the reader gets is of a vague, impossible character, I can but plead that this book records not fiction but the truth as I saw it ; and the truth about Mr. Matabee was, I repeat, that as a real person I did not see *him* at all.

He was, Louis told me, a bachelor, and he looked about forty. His parents had been Japanese, naturalized French. He himself was a French citizen and had been educated in France. All this seemed plausible enough and, as far as it could go, was true on the face of it. Louis, who only went to Saigon when, as fairly frequently happened, his wife presented him with a baby, had nevertheless contrived to meet Mr. Matabee there. But by Mr. Matabee he was, I think, perpetually bored ; and their acquaintanceship was slight. It appeared that Mr. Matabee kept no business hours, and had no office address, but did in fact hold some sort of an appointment in the French Colonial Secret Service, or some such department. Louis said that he was one of a very limited body which could demand, at any hour and with unvaried success, an audience with the Governor-general.

Most of this I found it difficult to believe. What Mr. Matabee was doing there in the jungle I shall never

know, but unless, professionally, he suspected either Louis or myself of subversive activities there was absolutely no reason that I could see why he should assume the idiocy that he did, except the very good one that he could not help it.

Take, for instance, the matter of the date. On the first day Mr. Matabee alleged, with a cogency I at first found it hard to refute, that it was December the twenty-ninth. Now I had kept a diary of the expedition which at some time during each day I had not failed to write up ; it needed but a glance at this to convince me—but not, alas, Mr. Matabee—that in fact it was the twenty-eighth. Louis, from memory, confirmed this, and I removed all doubt by arriving, subsequently, in Saigon not a day earlier than I had planned, but on the day itself. As Mr. Matabee had spent an urban Christmas, you would have thought him—that is, if you had not actually met Mr. Matabee—not incapable of keeping an accurate account of the three days which had since elapsed.

What was he doing here ? Though he stayed with us for three days, and would doubtless have remained for longer if we had not gone away, this was a question which, strive as I might, I was never able to answer. For Mr. Matabee was a man whose interests, if he had any at all, were very far removed from jungles. I assumed at first that he desired to hunt, if not with us, then in competition with us. But he knew not one end of a gun from another. A botanist, was he perhaps come to study the flora of the district, to look for a rare plant ? I was on the wrong track ; Mr. Matabee

knew nothing whatever about botany. I thought of ethnological reasons for his visit, and presumed that he might be investigating not vegetable plants but the family trees of the inhabitants. I erred again. In despair, lacking ideas, I invented for him a mistress in the village. But this was unlikely ; the Moys are strict monogamists ; it was improbable that any father would permit his daughter, or husband his wife, to have intercourse with a stranger, even if there had been a lady willing to enter into such a relationship with so unattractive a figure as Mr. Matabee. Try as I might, I could not account for his presence on any grounds at all. I concluded, lamely, that from civilization he was, temporarily at least, some kind of exile, perhaps only a penurious one ; it certainly cost him nothing to live with us.

I have seldom seen a more unhappy man, or one who resembled so unmistakably a fish out of water. He remained all day in the vicinity of the hut, while we were hunting, and what he did there I cannot conceive. Pathetically delighted to see us in the evening, he would talk incessantly for an hour or two, chiefly about food. Embarrassingly humble, he perpetually implored us to eat his dates, and his oranges and bananas, and though in return we gladly offered him some of the deer, of which there was more than ample for two, he nearly always declined it with infinite modesty. (But I suspected that he made a hearty meal off it at midday.) Louis concealed, with a fine restraint, his impatience with the man, and only let himself go on the subject when he and I were

alone and with some violence he would commend the gentleman to hell. For my part, I finally got used to Mr. Matabee. He became as much a constituent of the expedition's home life as the curious hordes who gathered to witness the cleaning of my teeth or my gun. He was almost, indeed, an indispensable adjunct to local domesticity, like a dog or a cat often becomes at home.

Poor Mr. Matabee ! I often think of him, sitting lugubriously in the hut awaiting our return. I can see him now, his round owl-like features wearing a puzzled look as he watches us remove our mud-stained puttees with a shade of envy. He does not understand why we hunt elephants. I hear his naïve questions, and, because we are somewhat weary and a little bad-tempered that again we have failed, our laconic replies. We are creatures of another world ; he becomes lonelier than ever. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of him on the last day, when we had raised camp and were returning to Suoi-Kiet. Louis and I have gone ahead, on the ponies. We halt to eat some chocolate and give the animals a rest. Ten minutes later the bullock-waggon, on which with all our luggage is insecurely perched Mr. Matabee, lumbers up behind us. Mr. Matabee's face, in contrast to what must be the feelings of his body, wears a gentle, dreamy expression. Is he, perhaps, a little quixotic ? I do not know.

As I say, I often think of him. I wonder, indeed, what he is doing now.

KING COBRA

Although both my time and my patience were getting short, it was necessary to spend yet another (the penultimate) day in unproductive waiting about. Elephants, it seemed, were highly sensitive creatures ; it was absolutely essential, Louis said, to leave the forest alone for a while in order to coax them back. So, as we ourselves were a little tired, we spent the day in the camp. I read and wrote in a desultory manner ; but for most of the time we talked, and in French, since Mr. Matabee spoke no English.

Generally speaking, the French are an insular and pacific folk, but they can be roused, on occasion, to use a strong hand against the natives. During the morning, Louis told me a good story in support of this.

Some years ago a certain French army colonel, of licentious disposition, had visited these parts on a hunting expedition and proceeded to hold relations with the married women of one of the villages, forcibly tying them to a tree for the purpose. The Moys are, as I have said, monogamists, and it appeared that certain of the more spirited husbands took exception to this involuntary faithlessness of their wives. But it

was perhaps a tribute to their tolerance rather than a slur on their understanding that, after allowing a whole week of such promiscuousness, they finally dispatched the lascivious colonel with their bows and arrows. News of the murder and its cause filtered, in due course, to Saigon. It was, official quarters decided, a matter for immediate action. So a squadron of bombing aeroplanes set forth and promptly annihilated the offending village.

Although this story is far from typifying French colonial policy as a whole (and I will endeavour to show why this is so in a succeeding chapter), it is, I think, fairly illustrative of at least two aspects of French life which are widely different from our own. The Moys are a charming and friendly, though rather shy, people. I often wondered what, in view of this incident, they thought of civilization.

Louis had an inexhaustible fund of true stories about the people who had hunted with him. Most of them, affording invaluable glimpses of human nature, were very good indeed. One of them concerned a young American in whom Louis, having had no previous cause to credit the man with altruistic motives, was shocked to perceive an almost inexpressible concern for Louis's safety when Louis descended from a tree in order to wait for an elephant.

"What the devil have *you* got to worry about?" Louis shouted to him, incredulously. "You're safe enough up there."

The American was shaking with fear. "It's n-not that," he managed to stammer at length. "B-but

how am I going to find my way out of this j-jungle if you get killed ? ”

After lunch, Louis mysteriously disappeared. Presently I heard a distant shot. I wondered idly what it was, the heat of the afternoon having induced a drowsiness that successfully overcame all attempts at serious thought. Mr. Matabee, recumbent on his slices of bamboo, began gently to snore, and I to clean my gun.

More and more, as the day dawdled on, I was impressed with the extraordinarily pagan and inactive life of this village. They were a strange society. Neither men nor women performed any work, yet the economic life of the place was totalitarian. A system of barter and exchange of services had ousted money, of which doubtless many of the inhabitants had not even heard. Of simple yet nourishing food (mostly rice) there was plenty, and a man had only to exercise his native markmanship with the bow and arrow to obtain, in due course, the rare delicacy of meat. The housing and clothing problems were simply solved, if indeed they could ever be said to have existed where the demands of the former were satisfied by a roof and of the latter by a piece of sack. Moreover, they were the most cheerful crowd I have ever met, and although I never understood a word of his, or anyone else's, conversation, there was no doubt that the old proprietor of the canoe was a bit of a philosopher in his way. Civilization has been defined as “ the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” If, as some hold, the word “ happiness ” should perhaps be qualified by

the adjective "enlightened," then civilization could not be said to have reached the jungles of Indo-China. Otherwise, I might be tempted to think that it had.

Late in the afternoon the episode of the shot was explained. Louis returned, carrying a fine peacock whose iridescent plumes were streaked with blood. We ate it for dinner ; and although, since it had not been hung, it was a little tough, it tasted like very good pheasant.

Only one excitement enlivened that day. When we had finished dinner, one of the Moys came to Louis and spoke for several minutes in animated tones. We learned that a woman who lived in a hut at the other side of the village had just died from a snake-bite. She had died philosophically and without fuss. She had, it appeared, been to a stream, unaccompanied, to bathe. Suddenly a hooded, or king, cobra had emerged from the dank shades and bitten her in the arm. The bite of an ordinary cobra, and of all other snakes in those parts, is unpleasant but rarely fatal ; that of a king cobra is, unless someone is present to lance and suck the wound, practically never anything else. The woman knew this, and was far from help. Quite calmly, she walked home, informed her relatives of what had happened, and died. It seemed to me to be an action not without bravery.

THE LAST DAY

To-morrow, I decided next morning, I really must go. I had to go to Singapore. I had to go home. I had to shoot an elephant. I had to . . . But enough. This was the last day, my last chance of taking home two tusks and a novel umbrella-stand, my last chance of fulfilling the rather strange purpose for which I had presumed myself to exist during the past fortnight. I was prepared for anything. Nerving myself with that outward calm, that apparent stoical indifference which is the first and last refuge of a sensitive man, I was ready to meet, in the words of Kipling, with Triumph and Disaster, and to treat those two impostors just the same.

The day was thick with incidents, which began early. We had lately reverted to paddling upstream in the morning instead of, as in the past few days, in the reverse direction. (This was pleasanter ; you spent a shorter time in the uncomfortable canoe when, during the fatigue of the evening, your resistance was less strong.) We now tied the canoe to the bank, and proceeded through a wood. To us this was virgin territory, but not, apparently, to the scores of men and women busily chopping at the thick trunks, hewing down the vast trees for the fine timber they afforded.

We followed, through this wood, what might euphemistically be called a path. Louis presently left it, advising me to wait for him, while he went and spoke to a neighbouring group of wood-cutters. I heard him ask if they had seen traces of, or had heard, lemons. What seemed an odd, or perhaps facetious, request was in fact neither. Lemon is, as near as I can make it, a phonetic rendering of the Moy word for elephant. The request, in the circumstances, was not only prosaic, but advisable.

What their reply was I do not know. At that moment there was sent forth by some nearby folk a resounding yell ; this was accompanied by a sinister crackling noise vividly suggesting—which is not surprising since that is what it was—a large tree in the ultimate stages of bisection at a point very close to the ground. I was inclined to take an academic interest in these proceedings ; I love to see and hear a good crash. It was not until I perceived the reason for the wood-cutters' cries, and saw the place where the tree was going to land, and knew with a sudden and sickening horror that the reason and the place were unified and personified in myself—it was not until then that I realized my interest must take a more active form.

Uttering a yell of terror I bounded sideways. I sped like a bullet. Shrubs, branches, spreading palm-leaves, and the insidious bamboo shoots—all these, which had for so long seemed impenetrable, I rushed through as if they had been so many aspects of a mirage. My entire past life, from the age of six, swam into my brain and grappled there with speculation on the

effects of the particular branch of this tree which was going to pin me to the earth. I regretted that I had not shot an elephant. . . .

With a tremendous crash the tree lay still. *And I was standing up.* It had not hit me at all ; the end of the nearest branch, a mere cluster of harmless twigs, was several yards away. The taste on my tongue was faintly sweet, as if I had just licked the two poles of a small electric battery. I was very much annoyed.

Louis was laughing. At the moment I found it difficult to take a sufficiently detached view of the situation to be able to emulate him.

Later, however, I recovered, and laughed as well. I laughed and laughed. There seemed to be nothing else I could do.

Feeling rather bewildered, I followed Louis on our way. Thus forcibly reminded of its contingencies, I saw that life, which even at the smoothest times is a sinister puzzle, had to me at least become more of a diabolical riddle than ever. I was reminded of the reality of something which I had found it more useful to forget. I was rather like a man who, having primed himself drunk with a number of double whiskies, suddenly plunges into a cold bath and finds himself sober again.

Nothing else happened before lunch. I was for some reason hungrier than usual and we sat down, on the customary collection of ants and quite innocuous spiders, to consume our sardines and a roll at half-past eleven instead of, as before, about one o'clock. It was a gloomy meal ; we had seen no sign of our quarry

and the minutes were flying by. I could detect, however, a new restlessness and keenness among the Moys which made me wonder whether in some strange way their lifelong association with the jungle had endowed them with powers of presentiment, whether in fact we were not going to be lucky at last. They said something to Louis, and he told me that they thought we were near elephants. But when I asked how they had reasoned thus he only shrugged.

We went on. We were walking along the edge of a forest, just inside it ; thirty yards to our right was a side border of the immense plain which was several miles long and, at this point, about two miles across. The Moys' presentiments increased rather than diminished ; in an atmosphere of mounting excitement we proceeded on tiptoe, speaking only in whispers. We did this quite unconsciously and it was wholly unnecessary ; elephants make so much noise themselves that it requires a sound almost as loud as a gun-shot to impinge on it. But by so doing *we* could, of course, hear better, and the ears of all of us were straining to catch a far-off sound. I tried hard to control my accelerated heart-beats, by holding my breath, by humming a tune ; but these efforts only made the beats quicker than ever. Something, obviously, was going to happen.

One of the Moys—of whom there were five—went to the edge of the forest and climbed a tree. Silently, we craned our necks to watch him. Louis removed his topi the better to expose his ears. I did the same. I heard not a sound.

Presently the Moy uttered a startled cry. “Lemon !”

And as he did so I faintly heard a far-off rustling, like a gathering, distant wind.

Louis and the Moy had an excited dialogue. Then Louis turned to me. "About fifty of them! They're coming this way." He struck a match; the smoke drifted over our shoulders, behind us, *away from the elephants*. This was fine. This was grand. "Get up a tree," Louis whispered. He himself was already some yards from the ground; and his rifle was cocked.

I looked about for a suitable tree. I must have spent some time doing this; the noise of the elephants, as they trampled through the grass, had become much louder by the time I had found one. In this dim, quiet forest, charged to us with so much suspense, it sounded like a storm invading the calm which precedes it.

For an amateur, I am as good at climbing a tree as the next man. The feat, however, cannot be performed with a heavy rifle. Giving mine, therefore, to the nearest Moy, with the idea that he would hand it up to me later, I prepared to make my ascent. I had just swung myself on to a low branch when the storm of the elephants suddenly blew with increased force. It sounded very close indeed.

The effect on the Moys was instantaneous. Four of them, who had been dancing about on the ground apparently afflicted with the same symptoms as St. Vitus, lost not a moment in fairly rushing up as many trees, thus defying the laws of gravity in such a way that Sir Isaac Newton, had he been a witness thereto, must surely have deferred his announcement to the world pending a more profound verification of his

experiments. The fifth Moy was a pitiable sight. In an agony of indecision whether to serve me by retaining the rifle, or himself by dropping it, he ran this way and that like a hunted thing. Eventually he could bear it no longer. Throwing the rifle to the ground—curtailing, as we were taught in the O.T.C., its life by ten years—he dashed to the foot of a huge tree and within five seconds was making his way through the topmost branches.

Precisely what thoughts then ensued in my head I cannot remember. I think I was confusedly conscious of the following : that general opinion held the elephants to be headed in our direction ; that having reached us they were liable to cause us injuries whose probable extent I did not immediately pursue ; that without my rifle I could not do what for so long I had waited to do, which was to shoot one ; that in order to have my rifle I must return to the ground and stay there ; and that by so doing I ran the risk of being trampled to death. Some such thoughts must have crowded into my brain with all the jumbled rapidity of a dream. The effect on my reasoning, and therefore on my actions, was this. Somehow or other all the repressions, the inhibitions, which so many failures of the past fortnight had planted in me, now suddenly blossomed forth into one vast, overpowering Complex. *Whatever else happened I must keep my rifle ; I must not throw away a chance to shoot.* That I must not be parted from my gun was a positive obsession, a kind of mania. That it meant descending to the ground and staying there was evidence not of courage but of imbecility.

I was not brave ; I am no great believer in the philosophy of Freud, yet I am convinced that I was temporarily at the mercy of psychological forces over which I had no control. Certainly the logic of my act was completely false. If the elephants had come, and if I had shot at one, some of the remainder would certainly have charged and probably have killed me. I wanted less than anything to be killed. My act, I repeat, was that of an imbecile.

Waiting on the ground in a dazed state, I chanced to look up at Louis. "Get up a tree," he was bawling. "Never mind the gun." To which excellent advice I responded not at all. I leapt behind a thin tree, where I stood an apparent part of its roots, and trembling from head to foot with fear. There I awaited the end. . . .

What happened then I do not know. Louis said the wind changed, that the herd had smelt us. They had advanced, like a platoon of mechanized tanks, to within twenty yards of the forest ; whereupon the leader had unaccountably swung off to the left, and instead of entering the forest they had skirted it for a short distance and were now turning back. They were going at a good speed ; it was useless to follow them through that long grass. They were, apparently, making for the hills beyond the plain.

Instead of descending from his tree, Louis climbed higher. The Moy whom I had charged with holding my rifle, conscious, apparently, of default, now hurried belatedly to my side and took the weapon with a rather shamefaced, sleepy look. He signalled to me to get up

a large tree on the edge of the forest, whose higher branches commanded a vista of the entire plain. He knelt down ; I stood on his shoulder ; somewhat like a camel he stood up and I swung myself onto a branch. He passed me the gun and followed me up the tree. By this means, reminiscent of mountaineering, I at length reached a height of perhaps forty feet, and had my gun.

I straddled a branch and looked out over the plain. The sight was unforgettable. Though the nearest was three or four hundred yards away, I could discern at least fifty elephants moving, slowly it seemed, towards the wooded hills beyond. They were split into groups of perhaps six or ten, and now and then, to the accompaniment of much ear-flapping and uplifting of trunks, one of them would utter a great blare, like a deep-noted trumpet. Probably there were a great many more than fifty ; the long green grass concealed all except their huge grey heads and backs ; and there is no doubt that some of the smaller females, and all the babies, drifted along invisibly. It was a splendid scene, and I wished that I had brought a telephoto lens for my camera. The most magical touch was added by the white egrets. You often see, treading through the muddy rice-fields in that country, a water-buffalo with a complacent blackbird standing on its back. The buffalo is always completely unconscious of, or at least unmoved by, its slight cargo ; I used to wonder if some mysterious affinity existed between them, whether the blackbird ever changed its mount and whether, if it did, the buffalo knew the

difference between one bird and another. I had got used to such a strange domestic scene. I had not, however, bargained for a white egret perched on an elephant. There were many such ; often they were the only means of telling if an elephant was there at all ; you would pick out the egret, a small white dot drifting over the grass, blown—apparently—by the wind, like the tiny distant sail of an invisible ship.

We could have shot from our high perches. Louis nearly did so, I cannot think why. At such a range there was a strong chance of wounding an animal but, as he admitted, practically none at all of killing one. We watched them for a while, with sinking hearts, and then decided to come down. This business, without the prospect of thrills to spur us to superhuman feats, was not nearly as easy as the reverse procedure. However, by snaky manoeuvres, I managed it somehow and only lost my hold at a height of about ten feet. Fortunately I fell in the long grass and on nothing more susceptible than my behind. I had twisted my stomach all over the place and the damage to my appendix wound was, I suspected, considerable. (Actually, there was no damage at all.)

I looked at my watch ; it was only one o'clock. Though we still had half a day before us, it seemed useless to go on. Anything that happened now could only savour of anti-climax. I do not know whether relief or disappointment was uppermost in my feelings. I do not think I had any feelings at all. I felt rather tired, and rather like a burst balloon. I sat down.

Louis, to his eternal credit, was not discouraged. We need not give up ; there was still a chance that, with a herd of that size, one or two strays might have wandered into the forest and be there yet. We got to our feet and went on. After a bit I noticed that the Moys (whose stock as courageous men of the jungle had, since that disgraceful exhibition, declined several points in my estimation) still moved with that curious, almost impalpable air of expectancy that I had remarked before. Perhaps, after all, there was still hope.

We crept on, still whispering, still on tip-toe. At length, from somewhere to our right, came the sound of a branch cracking. I knew of old this sound ; if it was made by an elephant, the elephant was white ; it was, in fact, in nine cases out of ten, made by a monkey.

This time, the tenth case, it really was an elephant. I blinked hard. Was I dreaming ? There, faintly through the undergrowth which at this point was thick, were two massive grey shapes. They stood quite still. They were facing us. They were, I suppose, at a distance of about thirty yards.

We got behind trees. My heart was thumping like a piston. One elephant, a large bull, was swinging his trunk in a slow, perpendicular motion, as if trying to smell us. Louis asked me if I could see between his eyes. As a matter of fact, what with the mass of foliage intervening, I could not be certain that any given part of his massive discernible forehead was anywhere near between his eyes. But I did not see the

point of telling Louis this. Desperately striving to recall the shape of an elephant, as last seen at close quarters in Regent's Park, I replied that Yes, I could.

"Then shoot, you fool."

I did so. Filled with a baseless optimism, uttering a small, silent, hastily improvised prayer, I leant the gun against the tree, aimed in the middle of the grey wall which was all that I could see of the elephant, made a supreme effort to steady my hand, and fired.

Now however revolting a creature I might appear to the reader, however wide the discrepancy between my own and the conventional virtues, I remain, thanks to the supreme egotism of my writing, the hero of this expedition. The fortunes which the reader is asked, vicariously, to follow are my fortunes. My disappointments must also be his ; my triumphs are his triumphs. Everyone, or nearly everyone, likes a happy ending ; and it is up to me to provide one. Alas, I cannot do so. It would be easy enough to invent a happy ending. It would be easy to record, for instance, that the elephant, mortally wounded, swooned off to a painless death, that in triumph I strode up to the third largest trophy on record, and that beside it I allowed my photograph to be taken with a modesty worthy of, and secretly emphasizing my pride in, the ancestral feats of my family in, say, Scottish butts. It would be easy to do this, and also profoundly untrue. And, for good or ill, I am recording only the truth.

I fired, then, at the elephant. The elephant looked at me, turned slowly round, and quietly trotted off to

the plain. The other one followed. The chance for which I had waited so long, with such patience, had been handed to me, if not on a plate, at least in a manner which put me in a position to take it. I had not taken it. The mounting grievances I had nursed against fate, culminating in a flood of self-pity and the conviction that I was the unluckiest man in the world, suddenly turned with overwhelming force against myself. I knew, then, that I lacked not the cards, but the ability to play them. I felt as small as a microbe. I resisted a masterful impulse to weep.

Louis I expected to be furious. To my surprise he was not. Uttering a mild regret that he had not shot at the animal himself, he said that it was a good deal easier to miss an elephant than an inexperienced person was liable to suppose, and that my shot, probably aimed a little too high, had very likely hit the thick bone forming the forehead ; this would have caused no injury and would have been a good reason for the complete absence of sympathy (for me) in the beast's response. Louis—fortunately, for I should have resented it—had no sympathy either, and I crept along disgustedly kicking tufts—an action wholly superfluous, since I was always tripping against the things anyway.

There now remained nothing to do except to get back to the camp. We were some ten miles from the canoe ; in the morning we had covered the distance partly in the forest and partly along waggon tracks cut through the grass. For the return journey Louis for some reason chose a route through virgin grass. This

grass, you will remember, was about ten feet high ; it grew as close as an English lawn ; and in order to make our path we had, of course, to tread it flat. I imagine that the experience is similar to walking on the bed of the sea, but more tiring. Louis, who led, had by far the worst time, having by leaning on the grass to make the path ; in his wake enormous walls stood up and enclosed us ; we were like the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. We steered by the hills. As this stretch of the plain was on the opposite side of the forest to that containing the elephants, we ran no risk ; but apart from this I began to wonder, after about two miles, where the amusement lay. After a further mile, and Louis's announcement that we still had about two more, I began to lose grip of my sense of humour. Hitherto I had kept firm hold of this ; I had often needed to. At the moment I was still smarting from the blow of failure ; I had walked through water up to my thighs and my boots were full of it ; and on top of this the long, tiring trek through this damnable grass was more than I could silently bear. For the first and last time I lost my temper with Louis.

“ What the something hell are we walking through this something grass for ? ” I yelled at him.

There was no reply.

“ Why the blazing hell couldn’t you go through the forest ? ” I shouted.

He still did not answer, and I gave it up. But I felt considerably relieved. When at length we emerged on to the waggon track and sat on a log and drank some tea, there was an awkward silence. Louis gave me a

sidelong glance. At length I had to laugh. After all, he had suffered more than I.

As we sat there a man approached us. He was a Moy hunter and, as always, Louis fell into animated conversation with him. Presently the man looked at me and gave an appreciative nod. He went on his way, and I asked Louis what they had talked about.

"He wanted to know if we had shot anything and I told him you'd killed an elephant," he replied.

I laughed. "What else?"

"He wanted some of the meat. I told him to wait for us here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning on our way to cut it up. We would arrange to take him along."

"Is he going to wait?" I asked.

"Yes."

"But we're going back to Saigon."

"I know." Louis grinned. "They're crazy to get meat. He'll probably wait here for days."

It was a childish and sadistic joke, but it appealed to me at the time. I often wonder how long it was before the man was disillusioned, how long he waited, whether, indeed, he is still waiting.

We returned without further incident. The next morning I left, with infinite regret, for Saigon.

P A R T I I I



Saigon—Singapore—Home

CHAPTER ONE

A MODERN CITY

I returned by train to Saigon with a drunken wood-cutter. At least, though he was sober enough in Suoi-Kiet, he was drunk at our destination. He was a young Frenchman employed by a timber firm. He lived, three or four miles from Suoi-Kiet, in a hut in the middle of the jungle ; and once a month, he told me, he came up to the metropolis for two days to spend his savings on drink, women, and general dissipation in a degree sufficient to carry him through his next bout of monastic existence. He was not wasting time in fulfilling this laudable purpose.

Solitude had made him shy, but after two rounds of beer, which he insisted on paying for, his tongue was loosened a bit. The third round was on me ; he had a double brandy and ginger-ale. Thereafter his silence gave way to sudden hoarse shouts and raucous laughter, into which he emerged from long fits of profoundest melancholy. He leered and made obscene jests at the native girls who passed through the carriage from time to time. Women were marvellous, he said. Perfectly marvellous ! But who would be such a damned fool as to marry one ? Answer him that, he bellowed, truculently but rhetorically. Have another drink ?

He was a nice man but, though I did my best to

stop him, at Saigon he was very drunk. I helped him off the train. Outside the station he gave me a tip and with considerable emotion wrung the hand of the porter, saying that he hoped they would meet again. I returned him the tip. When I left him he had given it to a rickshaw coolie (who made a rapid, astonished get-away) and having sat heavily in a luggage trolley was shouting at the porter to take him home. I hope he got there and wonder, if he did, how.

By the time I reached the hotel it was nine o'clock. On the terrace the gayer sparks of Saigon society were sipping final cocktails. They were smart in their white ducks. With my chestnut face and arms, and wearing a khaki topi and a vest and shorts whose association with jungle dust had given them a sort of brown mottled effect, I was an incongruous, probably an alarming, sight. I rather think that some who saw me arrive attributed to their ultimate cocktail a stronger kick than it had warranted from my absence. With some difficulty I persuaded the hotel that I was a suitable resident, and after that the taking of a bath and a meal, and the process of retiring to bed, were simple matters. I felt queer and slept fitfully. I thought I had drunk too much.

The next morning I was no better. I had slight fever, no doubt due to a form of reaction after the strenuous days in the jungle. It was nothing much, and as I was due to leave the following day for Singapore I had to ignore it and fuss around at the bank, the shipping office, and the passport place—all this in a kind of fluid daze, rather like a dream.

At the British Consulate there were letters from England. Containing my first home news for over two months—and very welcome for that—they nevertheless had an element of the fantastic not entirely due to my unwonted mental and physical state at the time. They referred frequently and perplexingly to former occurrences of which I was deemed to have been apprised by previous letters which had, in fact, never reached me owing to my having been unsure of a forwarding address. Reading them, I felt like a man attempting to solve a crossword puzzle from which half the clues are missing. "Well," they would begin, cheerfully assumptive, "Helen has broken it off as we all guessed she would. We think it was for the best although he, poor dear, is awfully cut up about it." In parts they were faintly reassuring : "John comes out of hospital to-morrow and is going off for a week to Torquay"; in others they were frightening, as when "after the funeral it was all very morbid and sad, and Gertrude, most irreverently as we thought, got drunk. Dorothy is sick because black, she says, doesn't suit her." And so on. It was all very confusing. It aroused in me speculation of the kind associated with one's arrival at a theatre in the middle of the second act.

I went to the bank, bought my steamship ticket, and had my passport stamped to the effect that I was permitted to leave the country—a formality which subsequently proved, as I had suspected but subserviently carried it out, redundant. The heat was appalling. I had eaten no breakfast, and after a lunch

consisting of a few glasses of lemon-squash I wrote some letters and lay down until dinner time. With the fierce sun extinct and my body rested, both the atmospheric and my own temperatures were slightly lower. I took a little nourishment and strolled round the town.

It was New Year's Eve—that day, to the Englishman, of anti-climax following exhausting celebrations of Christmas. To the French it is the peak, the climax itself, of festivities for a nation which discerns a more lasting reminder in a New Year gift, and which has had the gourmet's sense not to inflict damage upon its liver and digestion from which it takes weeks to recover. For this reason the shopping centre of Saigon—and most of this commercial city consists of the shopping centre—bore, on that evening, a slight resemblance to Oxford Street on Christmas Eve.

Saigon is a kind of small, modern Paris. At a guess I should say that it was easily the cleanest, most up-to-date, and probably the most attractively planned, city in the Far East. Only its perpetual and enervating heat prevents it from becoming gay or fashionable—a heat that sends all its foreign colony, when it can snatch a rest from work, dashing up to the hills or to the seaside. Some of its stores are both large and comprehensive, and the goods are temptingly displayed. The streets, many of which are fifty yards wide and lined with perpetual flowers and green trees, are at night a blaze of green and red and yellow and blue Neon lights. The people, most of whom were out shopping that night, make a fine potpourri of races : Annamese, Chinese, Tonkinese, Indians of several castes, Malays,



(Above) EARLY MORNING ON LAGNA RIVER

(Below) MOY WOMEN AT HOME

and French. Many of them are half-castes, Annamese-Malay and even French-Annamese, the native women making good wives to foreigners whom the scarcity of their own countrywomen would otherwise condemn to bachelorhood. The Annamese, who predominate, are quiet, happy, smartly dressed, and—to a foreigner like myself—incuriously polite. They are model citizens ; I did not notice a single policeman in the town. (Though there were hundreds of motor-cars, of modern French and American makes, the automatic traffic signals were carefully and always obeyed.)

The architecture is new and simple. The shops are well ventilated without doors. Most of the houses are made with balconies instead of windows ; furniture is cut to a minimum of cane chairs and stone floors, which are cool. One washes always in cold water. In combating the heat Saigon has one advantage over a place like, for instance, North China. In July and August probably no place in the world is hotter than Peking and Tientsin, and yet the houses there have to be built with double windows and elaborate central-heating arrangements to withstand three or four months of a winter in which the temperature is always a long way below freezing-point. During the summer in such houses, cool draughts are synthetically provided by fans. The temperature of Saigon, as of Singapore, varies little throughout the year ; the houses there are built to let in the breeze instead of, as in North China, to shut out the heat as well as the cold. There is no question of turning the fans off and the central-heating on.

Saigon is the largest city in Indo-China. It has a population of 125,000, but four miles away there is a Chinese commercial city, Cholon, which with 200,000 inhabitants, mostly Chinese, brings the total up to 325,000. The population of the whole of Indo-China is about 21 millions, or half the number of people in France, in a country which is nearly one and a half times the size of France. Besides Saigon, the only towns with over 100,000 inhabitants are Hanoi and Haiphong.

These towns, by Western and even other Eastern standards (Shanghai's population is about 4,000,000), are tiny. The reason is that about 90 per cent of the total Indo-Chinese population lives on the land, chiefly cultivating rice, pepper, rubber, coffee, and tea.

By repute, the French are unwilling colonizers. People who discern in this some obscure reluctance in the national character, who babble of home life and insularity and deplore the absence in the Gallic temperament of a flair for empire-building, merely confuse a lot of ridiculous and non-existent theories with facts. As colonizers the French are potentially as good as the British. But the facts are that the climate in every one of their colonies, is, except to the toughest Frenchman, insufferable. A glance at the map, coupled with the most rudimentary geographical knowledge, will convince any sceptic of this. French Guiana, Algeria, Tunis, French Sudan, French Equatorial Africa and the Cameroons, Indo-China, Madagascar, and a few islands in the West Indies and the South Seas—except for Algeria and Tunis there is not one of these places which is not bang in the middle of the tropics, with

little but dry dust or torrid jungle to recommend it as a home from home where the temperature is pretty consistently kept at around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. To live in such places requires an inducement stronger than the customary ones of a trebled income, a life of leisure, and being a person of importance in a country where the servant problem is as apocryphal as the high cost of whisky. And the French can guarantee this no more than the British. But the British have more comfortable colonies.

Except the north coast of Africa, Indo-China has probably the best climate of all the French colonies ; but its unremitting heat—at least in the south—would drive me crazy if I had to live there. The French population is not high, but at 46,000 in 1933 the number had been doubled over the past twenty years. Of these only about 15,000, representing soldiers and government officials, were really compelled to live there ; the rest were commercial or professional civilians whose immigration had been voluntary.

The colony is not only financially independent of the home government, but it is able out of its own budget to provide subsidies for its development, in such undertakings as dredging and irrigation and the opening up of communications and mines. In trade importance among French colonies and protectorates it now ranks second only to Algeria.

The French have done much for the natives, with whom they are popular. Education now ranges from the elementary, by the wide and cheap dissemination of pamphlets in the native tongues, through the primary

stage conducted in French and enabling students to obtain diplomas equivalent to those of France, to the final stage provided by two high schools affiliated with Paris universities. The natives are thus able to qualify for, among others, the law and medical professions. Native ownership of land is not only permitted but encouraged by the formation of mutual credit societies for the lending of money, at a low rate of interest, to purchase property. Public health is on a high level. The equipment of the various *Instituts Pasteurs* provides for the annual vaccination of over 9,000,000 natives against such endemic diseases as cholera, smallpox, leprosy, and the plague. These scourges, as a result, have been almost completely checked. This is in happy contrast to contiguous China, where in every year they claim millions of victims.

Incidentally, and while on the subject of disease, there are, I believe, only two laboratories in the world which manufacture the serum for use against the most frightful affliction on earth, rabies. One of these is at the Louis Pasteur Institute in Paris ; the other is in Saigon. Thanks to the serum, it is a disease which, with its terrible symptoms of frothing at the mouth, and raving violent madness followed by death in acutest torture, human beings seldom get. It will always, through its morbid masochistic appeal, be a topic of human interest, and I was keen to visit the Saigon laboratory. It was only my fever, and my consequent ability to accomplish little except lie down, which prevented me from doing so.

Ten o'clock on that New Year's Eve still found me wandering in the streets without aim. The streets were beginning to empty ; the shops were now shut and shuttered. I began to walk home.

If, as I have said, the ordinary citizen of Saigon is on the whole polite and incurious towards strangers, there is also an exceptional type which is the exact reverse. I refer to itinerant vendors. These people, towards whom I suspect the French temperament of being more tolerant and tender-hearted than the British, were nothing but a damned nuisance. I suppose my vague and rather lost look, my hesitant step along ways of uncertain destination, stamped me too obviously as a gullible foreigner. Postcard and newspaper sellers, plain beggars and rickshaw coolies, pursued me all over the place. I told them to go to hell. "Oui, monsieur," they shouted one and all and continued to follow *me*, hoping at length, if not exactly believing, that they were unconsciously obeying my commands. I turned one corner and was suddenly confronted by a man bearing the stuffed head of a tiger. Its mouth had been fixed in an open snarl, and its tongue and teeth-gums painted in exaggerated carmine gave to the beast an aspect at once synthetic and terrifying, the latter far exceeding the reality. The whole was fixed to a hideous board. He wanted five pounds for it. I told him that I had shot a much bigger one for nothing, that my name was Newcastle, and that he had better try to sell his coals somewhere else. But he joined in the procession. Some people do not know the meaning of disillusion.

The wise and logical thing to do, when I reached the hotel, was to go to bed. I was tired ; I was ill ; and even if it *was* New Year's Eve—I reminded myself with a momentary pang of self-pity—I knew not a soul in this indifferent irrelevant city with whom I could imbibe rum or champagne, and sing with linked arms the French equivalent—whatever it may be—of Auld Lang Syne. No, everything—reason, the time, loneliness, interests of health—pointed to my going to bed to woo a sleep which I knew would prove as elusive as quicksilver.

Custom, I suppose, or some fatuous impulse, or the desire to scorn common-sense and score off myself, urged me to stay up for a last drink or two. It was nearly eleven. Although the streets were empty and there was not a soul on the terrace, later on, I was assured, there would be dancing on a wooden lit platform in the garden. If to partake vicariously in this was dissatisfying I could always—yes, damn it, I could and would—stand a drink to the Annamese waiter and jolly well make *him* sing with me. I would be not only international but inter-racial. As a matter of fact everything on that night seemed so unreal that I felt like doing anything. It all seemed equally worth while, and at the same time equally pointless. Like the mad Ophelia, I could have turned thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, to favour and to prettiness. With Hamlet, I saw man as nothing but quintessence of dust.

What I did not see was any sign of dancing. There was not even a band. There was nobody at all. Once,

as alone on the terrace I sipped hot whisky and lemon, there went past a solitary car. It contained two couples in evening-dress. And as they went they sang ; they shouted and waved at me. I waved back.

I looked at my watch. It was midnight. I had at least greeted the New Year with the appropriate *bonhomie*. I remember those four animated ephemeral faces with gratitude.

Where had everybody gone ? To the hills ? To the seaside ? The French take a holiday on New Year's Day. And, as I said before, Saigon is neither gay nor fashionable.

Still, it *was* New Year's Eve.

Had they, in a town in which the inhabitants rise at six in the morning, all gone to bed ? I did not know. I cared less. I was concerned, at last, only with going there myself.

CHAPTER TWO

TEMPEST AND TEMPERATURE

The telephone beside my bed uttered a sporadic and foolish tinkle, like a car firing on one cylinder. Thrusting a hand through my mosquito-net, I clutched at it. It was a very ancient instrument.

"Allo, allo, allo," it said, from a long way off.

"Allo, allo, allo," I echoed, feebly and reluctantly. I loathe saying anything on telephones. Having to talk to my invisible communicant in French, and on a dud machine, was a nightmare.

There was silence, followed by a fearful explosion. Then a dim voice : "Is that you?"

"Hullo, Margot," I shouted. "I can't hear you."

"How are you?" she screamed faintly, though at the top of her voice.

"Terrible," I roared. This was the truth. Tight bands of iron seemed to be fastening my head to the pillow. Chairs and tables swam towards me, and then drifted away again. I felt drunk.

"We're downstairs," she yelled.

"Are you? You sound like the North Pole."

"You'd better come down. It's nearly twelve o'clock."

"Can't," I bellowed. "I'm dying."

"All right. I'll come up."

She came up, looked at me, put a cool hand on my burning forehead, and said that I had got something. But I had discovered this some time ago. She gave me aspirins.

She and Frederico had returned that morning from Angkor. They were to leave the following day for Hong Kong. For my part, I had obviously become infected by some obscure, ubiquitous bug of the jungle. The point to decide was whether or not I was well enough to catch the boat for Singapore at four o'clock that afternoon. Clearly, in a sense, I was not. But, after all, I had merely reached a state in which it was essential to remain prone ; whether this was done on a bed or on a ship's berth did not seem to matter very much. There are a number of unfortunate souls who, especially on short journeys like this, never venture outside their cabins ; and on a modern ship there was, if the worst should happen, every facility for tending the sick. Finally, if I was in for a long bout of fever, I would rather endure it in a British colony, where I had a few friends, than in a French one where I had none.

Relief followed the aspirins. The others performed my scant packing, and saw me on to the ship.

Alas, it was a very old, a very small, a very unsteady ship indeed. It was dirty. It looked about the size and calibre of some of the more antique ferries used for crossing the lower reaches of the Thames. I made the fourth to three unseen passengers. I crept into my cabin, and prepared to adapt myself exclusively, for three days, to the society of cockroaches.

The racket of winches and shouting coolies at length ceased. We steamed down the twisting Saigon river and out to sea.

I ate not, but drank quarts of lemon-juice, liberally diluted with soda-water and pieces of ice taken from the bag I had dumped on my forehead. Idly, with an air of abstraction, I toyed with a Centigrade thermometer, laboriously converting its figures to Fahrenheit. My temperature was 103.

The temperature of my cabin was not much less. The fan whirred ineffectually and with an irritating noise, like a blue-bottle. But I kept it on as a gesture, a matter of form, as a minor state appeals to the League. I did not sleep a wink during the night, much of which I spent staggering all over the ship in vain search for a cool and soft couch.

In the morning the cabin-boy expressed concern at my continued fast, appearing to connect it with some form of native superstition. Doubtless, if I had eaten, we should have avoided the storm. As it was, we ran into it at about lunch-time. It turned out to be a miniature typhoon.

Normally, I am not a bad sailor. I hold that the mental state of a great many sufferers makes them feel seasick long before the actual motion of the boat affects their stomachs. (This is proved by one's ability to sleep through a rough sea.) Concentration on less personal matters, the use of will-power, usually keeps me immune. But this storm was enough to undermine the toughest constitution ; the ship was altogether too small for the enormous waves. The

incredible thing was that I did not feel sick. (Having had nothing to eat for two days I obviously could not *be* sick.) I can only attribute this to the overwhelming power of my already precarious state to distract me. Though I felt on the point of a sudden death from every other affliction I did not, could not, feel sick. Judging from the groans and hurried scufflings in adjoining cabins I had at least one advantage over the other passengers.

Powerful disadvantages, however, offset this. Lack of food and sleep, the recondite operations of the bug, were telling their tale. The mercury moved up one degree. First my head, and now my back, caused excruciating agony. I had no form of drug. I had held out for as long as I could and now, after sending an S O S, unanswered, to the passengers, I summoned the Captain.

The wind whistled through the bare rigging. Rain lashed the decks. Doors banged ; crockery crashed ; the ship leapt and slithered and rolled and creaked. Great waves dashed over the bows. It was much cooler.

The Captain stood in my cabin doorway. He was a little Frenchman. His face wore an expression of mingled suspicion and concern. Had I dared his authority on the bridge ? Was I really ill ? Clearly, either mine must be an exceptional case, or he would demand whether I did not think he had more important things to do, in command of a precious charge through a perilous gale, than pander to the inconsequential whims of a seasick passenger.

I told him in a bored voice—for by this time I was past caring what happened to me—that I had a high temperature, many pains in my head and back, and that I could not sleep. Had he, I enquired, a little quinine? Some aspirin, perhaps? (Though I felt that morphia would have been more to the point. There was, as the reader will have guessed, no doctor on board.)

Apparently my complaints were unconvincing. The Captain made reassuring little nods and uttered faint cooing noises, as though I had been left alone in a pram by my nurse. “C'est la mer,” he foolishly insisted. “Il va faire beau bientôt. Restez tranquil. Bien sûr.”

In vain I protested. I groaned without effect. He went away.

Later, the sea subsided and my temperature rose. It was 105. I had had many and varied fevers before, but never had the thermometer achieved such an astronomical figure as this. There recurred to me childish, fantastic arguments about the highest temperature compatible with life. This exceeded them all. Without the slightest doubt, I was going to die. My uppermost feeling was one of annoyance. Apart from my family and a few friends, an overcrowded world would certainly not feel the loss. I asked only to be allowed to die in peace, without pain if possible, and, since I had done nothing to deserve otherwise, I did not mind being forgotten. Nevertheless, I was annoyed. There is a certain fundamental dignity about death. It inspires, or should inspire, awe. Somehow the idea

apparently current throughout the ship, that I was suffering from a prosaic attack of seasickness, seemed to lack that due content of awe-inspiring dignity which was warranted by the true position. My immediate neighbours were to be ignorant of a majestic, a moving event. I did not want them to be ignorant of it. I wanted them to be affected by it, for the good of their souls, as they should be affected. Besides, just to leave me here afterwards, still suffering (as they thought) from seasickness—well, in this hot weather . . . I mean, was it quite . . . ? My indignation, I felt, was righteous.

At this moment one of the passengers came into the cabin. He was a young American. So much I had judged from overheard speech ; I knew no more about him.

“ Bon jour, monsieur.” The voice was shy, hesitant.

Relief at this recognition was tempered, for a moment, by his mistaking me for a Frenchman. I do not dislike the French. Nor am I sufficiently unaware of our national vices to derive any profound self-respect merely from being recognized as English. Except on the grounds, pleasing to vanity, that Englishmen are generally better-dressed, I cannot explain this feeling ; and I had forgotten that I was, at the moment, nude.

He gave me aspirin, which had no effect, and held a consultation with the other passengers, an Australian and another American. The situation, they decided, was grave. They went to the Captain.

The little man now returned. He was in a bad way.

Among the numerous contingencies confronting a man in his office, it appeared that a burial at sea was something very improbable. He was unprepared for it. On the other hand, he was unprepared for anything else. He knew nothing about medicine, and had none to administer ; there happened to be no other ship within hundreds of miles ; and—on this point, at least, he was lucky—the problem of whether it behoved him best to turn back to Saigon or to continue to Singapore was automatically solved by the ship's being, at this crisis, exactly half-way between the two. As it made no difference, we went on, but at a hectic speed.

Nothing else could be done except to solve the problem—probably vital—of getting me to sleep. Aspirin was about as sleep-provoking as strong black coffee. The young American chose, and for hours read to me in a deliberate monotone, the most boring book he could find. (I do not know his name, and I have never seen him since ; but this was an act of kindness for which I should like him, if possible, to know I shall be eternally grateful.) It was of no use. Nothing short of chloroform, I thought, would have induced me to sleep that night.

But then a miracle happened. The Australian passenger unearthed a couple of yellow cachets. Nobody knew what they contained ; I, for one, did not care. The Captain countered—to everyone's surprise, since they had ordered the stuff, in vain, at dinner the night before—with a bottle of cognac. The steward brought some hot tea. I chased the cachets with a cup of tea flavoured with several double

tots of cognac. In ten minutes, except that I still breathed, I might have been dead.

I slept for four hours. At the end of it I found myself lying in a pool of sweat, with my headache gone, and my temperature down by four degrees. I moved into another bunk, and slept till morning. My temperature was not much above normal. I drank some soup. The Captain came to see me, sighed, muttered once more that it had probably been due to "la mer," and telegraphed the engine-room to knock a couple of knots off our speed.

After that I became fussy and aggressive. My temperature rose again and I still felt very ill ; nevertheless, it now seemed remotely possible that I would live, and I was full of fight. During that long day I lay motionless, exhausted. People popped into the cabin from time to time and I cursed them ; but they did not mind ; they knew, I suppose, that I had walked in the valley of the shadow, and was now out of it.

Tea and cognac had no effect that night. I did not sleep. We reached Singapore at dawn, and soon afterwards I was taken off in an ambulance to the General Hospital. I soon got better.

But I shall remember that short sea-trip for many years to come.

CHAPTER THREE

BRITISH BURDEN

I stayed in that hospital a week, during which numerous efforts among the staff to classify my disease proved abortive. The nurses were Chinese, and they and I developed a tacit and mutually beneficial system of exchanging information. They wanted, naturally, to know about China, from one whose residence in the land of their fathers was much more recent than their own. For my part, my position was somewhat analogous to that of a blind man who has lately moved into a house in a new district. This was my first visit to Singapore, and I soon found that I had spent several days in a city of which I had seen no more than the inside of an ambulance and a hospital, and the outside of an uncompromising brick wall bounding, I was told, the prison. Stone walls may not always a prison make. This certainly made one for me, and my curiosity concerning Singapore topography had to be vicariously satisfied by information which I could extract from the nurses in exchange for what I told them.

The man I was going to stay with popped in now and then, and at length, when I had been normal for two days, he popped in for the last time and I, feeling like a piece of wet blotting-paper, went out with him.

There followed a week of tedious convalescence. I call it tedious because, though my friends were cheerful and kind and had the loveliest house you could wish

to see anywhere, my nerves were all to pieces and I was as weak as a kitten and had frightful headaches and could not appreciate any of these comforts as I should have done.

But I did manage to see a little of Singapore, and of the country round it. My first impression of the town was of its great age. Very few of the buildings are modern ; most of the offices are as ancient and drab as the premises of the average solicitor around Lincoln's Inn. The streets are narrow and twisting, and along them are driven the products of Lords Austin and Nuffield by Chinese chauffeurs anxiously seeking a haven for a period strictly limited to two hours. (I seemed to be near home.) From the office of my host, who is the branch manager of a large insurance company in the East, I looked down upon the esplanade and harbour. Hundreds of steamers and smaller craft lay at anchor. A throng of sampans sluggishly stirred. For a moment I was reminded of the Bund at Shanghai.

Far East and Middle East meet in Singapore. There are thousands of Chinese and Malays ; the former live their own banking and shopkeeping lives in their own city, individual and indivisible, working only for themselves and their families. And over from the West have come Jews and proud, bearded Arabs, Bengalis and the sinister Tamils, the black scum of the earth. You pass them all in a two-minute walk under the fierce glare of the sun. You will pass a few sweating English business men as well, and the wives and small children of English army officers. Surprisingly, few of them wear hats : sunstroke is not one of the dangers

of Singapore. Why this is so, in a town which is only one degree north of the Equator, I have no idea ; nor do I know why in Bombay, which is a long way farther north, to venture out of doors at midday without a hat is almost suicidal. But I believe it has something to do with the atmosphere.

Like Hong Kong, Singapore is an island. It is separated from the peninsula by straits of about half a mile in width, crossed by a causeway. I suppose because the town is open to the sea, the heat is less oppressive than it is in Saigon. Singapore offices, instead of closing for four hours in the middle of the day, only close for one (in the rest of the East the tiffin interval lasts for at least two hours). Business hours, generally, are very long in a part of the world where business is not taken as seriously as it is in the West.

The country-side is beautiful ; I have never seen so many flowers, and the leaves and grass maintain perpetually the vivid fresh green which you only see in England in early summer. There is often a breeze of sorts blowing in from the sea. This has a habit of swaying the innumerable and tractable leaves of the coco-nut palms in a manner which creates a pleasing impression of coolness nearly always belied, in fact, by the temperature. The land is agreeably idyllic, in the South Seas manner, but I for one should soon get tired, living there, of its perpetual summer. I like change in most things, and if the only thing to be said for winter is that spring lies not far behind, then it has, in my opinion, amply justified itself ; I do not ask of it anything further.

Perhaps the most incongruous, and also the most

British, sight is the Rugby football posts. It is too hot to enjoy any open-air game, except tennis in the hour before sunset ; but both Rugby and cricket are played with at least a show of enthusiasm, chiefly by the Services. There is a so-called season for both, selected in a manner which, since it cannot be based on non-existent changes of light, weather or temperature, can only be called arbitrary.

There are, it seems to me, two ways of dealing with the problem of sex in a climate in which the urge is difficult to control, where great store is set by the chastity of unmarried girls, and where you have a large number of healthy young men living bachelor lives. One way I had seen in French Indo-China, which had frankly supplied a colonial market for a trade which flourishes in Paris. (There were, in Saigon, almost as many French prostitutes as native women—all respectable citizens in their own class.) The other way could be seen in British Singapore, where thirty young men at a time sublimated their repressions by chasing a leather ball at great speed in a temperature of 85 degrees. Whether the French natural method is better than the British flagellation I am not prepared to guess ; but the issue, I suspect, goes deeper than the solution itself which, properly speaking, should decide a case on its merits. Education has a lot to account for the two methods, and to the French method the British character is probably unsympathetic in a general sense.

My host drove me round in a fast car. We visited the air-port, built on land reclaimed from the sea and looking not unlike Croydon. The vast, uncompleted

naval base was well guarded ; nobody was allowed in. It contained, however, no ships ; the fleet was all at Hong Kong. A.R.P. was being assiduously practised, and black-outs were frequent.

One afternoon we drove out of the Straits Settlements, over the causeway, through two lots of customs, and into the Malay State of Johore. This was Somerset Maugham country, the land of Residents and D.O.'s. Up and down that peninsula a mixed crew of Englishmen, from Colonial Government official to rubber planter, were toiling in the midday sun and drinking gin *pahits* at sundown in club or bungalow. They were men who, in the last analysis, are the sole trustees of that Empire on which the sun never sets ; they led lonely lives ; and their repressions were such that they were sometimes driven to perform queer deeds of extraordinary violence. (Nearly all Maugham's stories are based on fact.) Nor was a bare living always easy to come by. Not so many years ago, when the price of rubber fell to 6d. a lb., hundreds of English planters lost their jobs and were forced into driving taxis and sleeping in the streets of Singapore. Heroic men all, only writers like Maugham stand between them and secular oblivion, just as the lives of coal-miners have been brought below a spiritual level by authors like D. H. Lawrence, Cronin, and Greenwood. Yet it is not that which keeps such people alive, although, by its vanity-appeal, it helps. They are sustained by a sense of the physical risk and, like ascetics, of the self-denial, of their callings. Their lives are more spiritual than the average existences.

We drove back in quick-falling dusk. The air

blowing through the car, a glimpse of telegraph wires, hills in the sunset with a foreground of water, combined to lend an English aspect to the scene. But only for a moment. In the stillness caused by the car's arrest while I took a photograph, the illusion was shattered by a damp heat unequalled by the accompaniment to any summer lightning at home. Somewhat subdued, I got back into the car.

There followed a few more days of slow convalescence, of sitting about on cool verandahs and on the terrace of the colossal open-air swimming-pool, sluggish with human spawn. (Because of sharks, it is nowhere safe to bathe in the sea at Singapore.) And then I found myself anxious to get home. I was still very weak ; what I most needed to restore my health was a long sea voyage. Sunny decks, cool salt breezes, too much food, nothing to do except read and lie still, with England ever looming slightly nearer—I asked for nothing more ; this would be perfect.

It might be supposed that I had lately formed a prejudice against ships ; and so, against those over a certain age and under a tonnage which I was prepared to fix as a minimum, I had. But the ship in which I now ventured lay far beyond the limits of either category. She was new, a white glittering monster of 36,000 tons or thereabouts. I said good-bye to my charming couple, climbed into this buoyant city, and was soon stranded in the gymnasium.

By the time I had found my way out of it, Singapore was a small green island, dotted with white houses, lying a few miles to our stern.

I went, dutifully, to unpack.

CHAPTER FOUR

LAST VOYAGE

Of the voyage home I have memories that are somewhat vague. Life on board ship has an inconsequent fluid quality ; its unreal, ephemeral values are those of a dream ; and indeed when you are tempted to record some of its incidents much the same sort of feeling of foolishness assails you as makes you decide at the breakfast-table, on second thoughts, to leave the account of your dream untold. I find it difficult to describe fantasies ; the result, anyway, is boring.

My ship was Italian ; it was distinguished mainly for its admirable food and its wide open deck-spaces, which because it was the off-season for Far Eastern travellers were almost empty until we got to Bombay. There was plenty of sun, and during the first few days I lay in a chair watching the long black streak of Sumatra and, when I became too hot, dived into the swimming-bath. It was a pleasant occupation ; I soon recovered my fitness.

The doctrines of both capitalism and Fascism were exploited on this ship, as on most others. Thus the oligarchic sanctums of the first class were jealously guarded from the bourgeois precincts of the second, and these from the proletarian allotments of the third. All men may not be equal, but most like the same

comforts, to which money seems to me to bear a disproportionate relation. About half a dozen first-class passengers seemed to occupy roughly three-quarters of the ship ; one-sixteenth of it appeared to be the approximate portion of forty passengers in the third class ; while a prodigious number of deck-passengers enjoyed about as much freedom as do flies on an over-loaded fly-paper. A sort of Grand Fascist Council of officers, engineers, and pursers enforced a military discipline on the crew and passengers, and the Captain inspired as much awe as if he had been Mussolini himself. The practical results of all this were estimable; I have never travelled on a cleaner or more efficient ship.

Prominent among the vessel's amenities was the daily news-sheet. Its items, while naturally yielding pride of space to emanations from Rome, were not, I think, too strictly censored. Regard was paid both to the English reader and to the Reuter, for the latter's messages were transcribed, very literally, as received in the language of the former. They made instructive, if at times rather difficult, reading. Thus one learned for the first time of the addition to our language of such pleasant, Anglo-Saxon-sounding words as ilp, ira, raf, and arp ; and new if slightly mysterious light on the character of Lord Perth rewarded one's reading of his “... prediction that quote Anglo-Italian friendship had been put on a firmer basis for all time full stop end quote.” On the whole, I spent many a happy and informative moment attempting to read these bulletins.

Our first port of call was Colombo. I was disconcerted, having planned an elaborate excursion up the

Kandy River with some fellow-passengers, to learn that we were not permitted to go ashore. I summed up the country, therefore, from the ship's rail. I saw a good many palm trees. An excessively enormous construction, a kind of advertisement hoarding in steel, announced, with considerable triteness, Ceylon For Good Tea. A wealthy Englishman on board, who appeared to have little use for dictatorships and less for their propaganda-news, spent five shillings on a British newspaper of the day before. (It was five in the morning when we arrived and eight when we left; Colombo newspapers are issued without the hustle attaching to their Fleet Street counterparts.) A large French liner was anchored within cabbage-throwing distance of ours; France and Italy were not on good terms at that time; and a faint echo of the European situation was sounded, I believe, by some hand-grenade fighting with this vegetable on the part of the galley-hands of the respective vessels. (I first heard of this skirmish a fortnight later, when I had reached home. Though I did not see the reports, English papers, I was told, had enlarged this to something like the status of an International Incident.) Nothing else happened at Colombo.

I toured Bombay in a cab, after indulging in futile argument with its aged Hindu driver on the subject of his fare. I cannot be bothered with arguments like this, and do not see the point of them. The game of Fleecing the Foreigner has been played, and probably always will be played, with conspicuous success by the natives not only in Paris and Bombay, but in a great

many other places where tourists go. And the odds are in their favour. The foreigner jingles an alien coinage the relationship of which to his own is complicated by a varying rate of exchange, difficult to work out in his head, and by a cost of living in the visited country which is either higher or lower (he does not know which) than the one to which he is used. Having to assess value in terms of cash, he is anxious only to do right. Through the prodigality forced out of him by helpful porters, guides, postcard-vendors, sellers of champagne and souvenirs, he has in the past almost always succeeded in doing wrong. The old conventions of the game are still a heritage of the present, and I for one, who am prepared within reason to accept them as a form of tax, do not see how it can be otherwise. For many things you are correctly charged. The point that few foreigners are able to decide is, which?

The importance of money to-day is exaggerated. (To this remark I make no original claim.) The average person thinks, for instance, that a financial bargain is a good thing in itself; in doing so he (or usually she) is apt to set an insufficient value on the means by which the bargain was secured. Mrs. Jones, refusing to be cajoled by her greengrocer into paying threepence for a cabbage, goes into a shop in the next street and triumphantly buys one for tuppence-ha'penny. The ha'penny saved accounts for a good deal: it has wasted her time and her shoes; for the sake of it, she has risked being run over. It turns the first greengrocer into a greedy profiteer. Augmented

to a possible penny by the fact that Mrs. Brown has bought *her* cabbage for tuppence, it implants doubt in the soul of Mrs. Jones, of whether she is, after all, a capable warrior in the battlefield of commercial competition ; it makes her introspective ; she feels a weakling, a greenhorn, a woman, in a desperate world of earning, spending, and economizing, of no worth. In brief, she is so preoccupied with her intent to save money that she has little time or inclination for anything else, and has lost her sense of proportion into the bargain. Which is a pity, and brings me—with apologies for this diversion—back to Bombay and the cab-driver.

The futile argument ended by my agreeing to pay what I suspect was about three times the just fare. To me this was satisfactory. Bombay does not cater especially for the tourist (as do, for instance, Cairo and Peking), and I told the man to drive round the city.

It is an immense and not, in my opinion—except in the suburb of Malabar Hill where government officials and rich maharajahs live—a very beautiful place. The truth of Kipling's famous “never the twain shall meet” is apparent, even superficially, in Bombay. Among millions of passively disapproving but physically comfortable Indians the sweating white man, having transplanted some at least of his own civic amenities, moves with a clumsy, a pathetic, a baroque air, even through the streets. He is an obvious misfit. He is less of a triton among minnows than of a whale which periodically must rise to the surface for air—the air in this case being a comic institution such as the Royal

Bombay Yacht Club, which no Indian has ever been allowed to enter. Cities, such as Shanghai, which are frankly Western in aspect, or others like Peking which are uncompromisingly Oriental, I do not mind. Bombay is neither. The pointed arch, the clustered column of late nineteenth-century Gothic architecture stand incongruously next to the domes of Byzantine, and these in turn seem out of place beside buildings of more forbidding Mohammedan, Parsee, and Hindu types. Along the sea-front have lately arisen hundreds of blocks of new flats, all simple and squat, with wide undecorated balconies. Called futuristic by an age which is probably too uncertain to assume the responsibility itself, they have perhaps a representative beauty of their own. Mixed with all this architecture of the past, they are frightening.

I did not know anyone in Bombay, and so I took a solitary lunch in a vast Oriental building, the Taj Mahal Hotel, reputed to be the most sumptuous in India. Oppressed by this city, I returned early to the ship. It was very hot and I lay in my cabin. I did not feel very well.

A vast number of passengers, including an Indian princess, came aboard, and we departed. I saw very little of these people : the next day I was re-visited by fever, and though it was slightly less virulent than before, it confined me to the ship's hospital, which achieved a temperature closely related to that of an oven, for the rest of the voyage. Here I subsisted on a diet of orange juice and what the ship's surgeon called quinino—two yellow substances which combined with fading

sunburn to produce on my face a jaundiced look that was, I believe, rather alarming to behold. The hospital staff spoke no English, and I no Italian. The effect of a *lingua franca* was, however, obtained by *my* guessing at the meaning of their Italian, and *theirs* at the import of my few words in Latin. It was not a comfortable illness.

We called at Massowa, on the shores of Eritrea. The southern part of the Red Sea can be, and usually is, one of the hottest places in the world even in winter. Five hundred Italian labourers, a trifle foul-mouthed after a bout of road-construction in the new Ethiopian empire, came aboard and made a good deal of noise on the way to their quarters in one of the luggage-holds outside the hospital. I had often wondered what was behind the proud façade of no unemployment in the totalitarian states. Here, at least, was one explanation. Brindisi, where these Italians got off, was only a four-days' journey from Massowa ; but even the lowest caste of Indians, who had presumably paid for their passages, were allowed the fresh air afforded by sleeping accommodation on the deck.

From Port Said we were honoured by the presence of the Arab delegates to what proved to be that monument of futility, the Palestine Conference. I did not meet any of these people. Until the last day, when to get accustomed to moving about I arose from my bed—on the following morning I had to catch the Simplon-Orient Express from Venice—I did not even see them. Moving with slow grace within the mysterious folds of full Arab costume, they were

handsome, sinister men. Their faces had a disillusioned but complacent air, as if they were assured both of the rightness of their cause and of the inevitable failure of the Conference, as no doubt they were. Most of the women on the ship went mad about them.

Brindisi was like the south of France, but colder. Enormous numbers of flying-boats took off at intervals of roughly half a minute and for a period lasting for half an hour. (That seems to work out at sixty, which is probably too many. But there really were a lot. I do not know where they were going.)

I saw a familiar face that morning. It wasn't . . . ? Yes, surely. . . . No, it couldn't be. . . . But it was. It was X. Three years ago I had been a reporter for a short time on the *Daily Express*. X had been on it too ; he was on it and an assignment now. My ship, then, was in the news. But only vicariously. We had on board a millionaire who had sworn to divorce his wife and marry his secretary. X had come to interview the millionaire, to get a new line on an old, old story. He travelled with us on the last day.

Rain lashed, ineffectually, the streets of Venice. To and fro, the gondolas drifted both in and beneath their element. The town has a traffic problem of its own, but road fatalities are, I imagine, negligible. The soft *chug-chug* of the water-taxi to the station made a favourable contrast to the gear-changing, brake-squeaking noises of a land vehicle. Soft little *plups* of cigarette packets and orange-peel thrown on the water, the dim patter of pedestrians on cobble-stones, the noise of a dipped or a lifted oar—this simple mosaic of sound had

HOME

Paris. The Gare du Nord. At eight o'clock in the morning suburban trains drew into the platform and stood at rest, hissing. From a long perspective of carriages issued an immense tide of workers, grim, predestined, despairing, ill-dressed. Silently, quickly, it flowed through the great delta of the station and out of all its mouths : a river of typists, bank-clerks, office-boys, charwomen, lift-men. A new day sprawled over Paris, over London, Berlin, Rome, Vienna, Prague ; the wheels of the vast and senseless Occidental machine were once more slowly beginning to turn after a night's rest. The jungle slept on in its old, old dream ; China was yawning and stretching her limbs after hers.

At one side of the station lay the train for Calais. I boarded it. Two English society girls occupied the next compartment ; Englishmen overran the train—English people, not the cosmopolitan crew of the East but real patriotic Britons, with a stake in their country's affairs, payers of income-tax returning to, as it were, their home in the next street. I stared at them rudely ; they were the first I had seen for two years.

English people filled the cross-Channel steamer : business men, earls, dowagers, artists, parties returning

from Switzerland. I was amazed and, listening to their chatter, profoundly interested.

Two years in China, of leading the life of the foreign community there, if it does nothing else it at least lends to the receptive, analytical mind an uncommon power : that of detached criticism. No critic of London, or of the English scene, is capable dispassionately to judge a pattern of which, through his own life, he so unequivocally forms a part ; such a subject must take the critic by surprise, it must be observed in startling relief against another more wonted, because more recent, scene. And since the outlook at home of, say, the average American, Frenchman, or even German, is much the same in its wider aspects as that of the average Englishman, the special relative position of the foreigner in China seems to me to be an ideal one from which to witness that scene. I mean that the position is special partly in the economic and social senses but, more particularly and importantly, in the national.

The International Settlement in Shanghai belongs to nobody and to practically everybody. Thousands of English people have lived there all their lives ; it is obvious that their outlook, their characters, their method of existing, must be widely different from those of Englishmen in their own country. Are they better or worse than people at home ? Which of the two are the happier ? . . . The richer or the poorer in soul ? Or are these questions meaningless ? Is it a problem of individual selection, of one man being what he is wherever he is ? Do any of the questions matter, anyhow ?

Everyone knows, or says, that the lives of Englishmen abroad are gayer, less of a drudgery, but more narrow and superficial and selfish, than existences at home. This is true, but is it a good or a bad thing? If, as it does, it will help to eliminate a character already infirm, is character really worth having, for its own sake? Could it be sacrificed for anything else? These are vast questions which cannot, and should not, be answered in a paragraph or two of a facetious book of travel. I am attempting to record here only a few somewhat incoherent and superficial impressions; I am trying to reveal one or two differences between the lives of the two types of people; the reader alone, if he likes, can go further.

Among the foreign communities in China, everybody is equal, in the Marxist sense: there are few sharp divisions of income or property, and none at all of class. Humanely, this is ideal. Nor is there individual fear, of the kind instilled by the spectre of unemployment; in China you may lose your grip, but never your job. Work involves no real drudgery nor produces real achievement, because there is no necessity, ambition, or incentive. Money is (or was) plentiful, because the Chinese are gullible and taxes non-existent. Nobody thinks and there is no art. Much leisure finds an outlet in much drinking. No one is obviously superior to anyone else; few people, therefore, have a sense of being inferior. This results in a complete absence of repressions. There are no violent hates, because the place is too small and life too short; but except on embarrassing—and, to that

kind of life, alien—emotional issues, there is no shyness and no reserve. No one has a sense of duty to a state, or a god, or an idea. Philosophy, so far as it exists at all, is one of conscientious hedonism. These foreigners are, in short, not unlike natives of the South Seas.

All this must sound horrid. Actually, until you reach middle age, it is great fun. Most young people are happy ; they have achieved pleasure at the expense of character. Character implies courageous allegiance to a belief, to a cause. What is the use of it, they might well ask, in a world of muddled values ?

Defeatism ? Backsliding ? Granted. But its effect on the individual is staved off until middle age. That is the great snag of China : middle age. For, once you start growing old in the country, you have nothing to fall back on . . . except whisky and gin. . . . Men have lived there in vain. Youth, whom they served so well, has deserted them, let them down. It is here that character would have stood them in good stead—character and tradition and memories of past achievement. They have none of these things : they are weak-willed ; their families were broken up long ago, when the children were sent home to school ; they owe nothing to England, England owes nothing, and means nothing, to them ; they are worse off than the Jews, because among them is no great brotherhood. They have no background, and therefore no backbone. Sex is their only reality ; most of them become feeble, fumbling, furtive, “nasty” old men. A few of them, retired, go home ; they have no friends there. Sooner or later, more often sooner, the sown havoc of whisky

is reaped. Whisky has shrivelled their brains and their intestines. Most of them die young. Perhaps it is a good thing.

Such were the people among whom, for two years, I had dwelt and thought. Here, on the little Channel steamer, in the trains, all about me, were the people of England, the friends of my youth and dreams. Who were they? What were they like? What did they mean to me, to the world present and to posterity? And already, I reflected, I had forgotten everyone I knew in China. That, perhaps, is the most telling feature of the place: it is ephemeral; from day to day; it is forgotten; it does not last.

Character seemed to me (during the next few weeks) to be the dominant feature of English youth, perhaps because I had seen, lately, so little of it: the will to succeed, to be just, to abolish humbug, to seek truth. Young men, animated by a high sense of duty, ambition and—perhaps—hope, worked long hours for little money; the paths to the professions were thorny with terrific training and examinations; competition, everywhere, was keen, and frequently the best man won. The general standard of knowledge was high; the wireless, the newspapers, the films, cheap and easy transport—all these marvellous and, on the whole, admirably exploited scientific creations combined to make this one of the most enlightened countries in history's most enlightened age. Personal problems were faced with courage, wisdom, and patience; there were individual experiments in living. But, binding all and surviving all, there remained the

unshaken ideal of middle-class family life, the backbone of the country ; and this struck, it seemed to me, a happy medium between the conventional Victorian bondage and the excessive post-war emancipation of the nineteen-twenties. It was an age without religion. Work and—to a far less real, but lately to a vastly increased superficial (because inspired by propaganda) extent—nationalism had replaced the hedonism of foreign China as food for the English spirit.

So much, and a good deal more on the same lines, I observed on my return to England. Admirable on the face of it, it seemed to be failing to advance the greatest cause on earth, that of human happiness. Why, with so much freedom, such access to knowledge, so many good and cheap comforts, did the vast majority of the people I talked to suffer from such an obvious feeling of frustration ? Why were they dull, pessimistic, and cheerless ? Why was life to them so serious a business ? Why their everlasting devotion to prejudice masking as duty ? Why such fatuous adulation of games and the cinema in preference to conversation, adventure, or love ? Above all, why did they crowd into uncomfortable cities ? I could not help thinking that the foreigners in China, for all their vices, were at least a happier bunch than this.

Part answer to many of these questions was to be found, I thought, in over-ambition. Too many people wanted too few good jobs ; they sought them in the cities because happiness, in a material age, lurked in machines, in mass consuming of potted enjoyment. Also, work was too standardized. (The

collapse of the National Service campaign was due almost entirely to failure to afford applicants responsible jobs needing individual effort, these being in paramount demand as a change from the monotony of everyday life.) Most people felt their real and better natures denied an outlet in the callings which they had adopted. Again, for repressed individual instincts, that poison of the masses, the cinema, by far the most popular recreation, was, paradoxically, by far the worst. Repressed love, repressed leadership and high spirits and desires for adventure—for these universal evils the cinema was anything but an antidote ; it added, at the worst, the further poison of tantalizing, because unrealizable, temptation. These wistful but idle dreams of the populace it turned, by its emphasis on the possible, into soul-destroying, implacable inhibitions. At its best, it appealed to the æsthetic and critical faculties of its audience ; it assuaged for an hour or two, but did not cure, the evils. Too often, at any time, it extolled those individual, positive virtues in a man, the very ones which its audience found it hardest to achieve ; and always it disseminated knowledge, of other lives, other places, than the audience's own, and left the bliss of ignorance too difficult a thing to maintain. It seemed to me to be the prime curse of the age. But perhaps it shared this position with overwork. Men, it seemed to me, worked too hard in their youth ; they grew old before they were young ; thousands of people, who had never sown wild oats, would never taste the full joys of life. Lastly, there were too many girls. Every woman ought, sooner

or later, to get married ; there did not appear to be enough men to marry them.

Given the evils, what were the remedies ? A lot more fun, obviously, to begin with. Life was altogether too drab, too serious a matter at present. People in England had, it seemed to me, too many worries and responsibilities, some real and some imagined. Nearly all these were rooted in money ; most families had not enough ; a few had too much ; all had made it their god and were serving it too well. Vicarious should give way to real romance, however imperfect ; mass receptive should yield to individually creative enjoyment. More congenial jobs must be found to banish drudgery, one of the major causes of war and unhappiness. There was still some muddle about sex, which ought to be cleared away. Too much envy and jealousy was felt among men. Too many people were afraid of losing their jobs or their souls.

The country was over-populated generally ; London, in particular, had too much unwanted talent. I thought of the Empire's colonies and their vast, empty spaces, of their—on the whole—equable climates. What was wrong with emigration ? Why did a stigma attach to, why was there a tendency to disdain as an exile rather than extol as a pioneer, an empire-builder ? Ninety per cent, or thereabouts, of the population of Great Britain would probably be better and happier, certainly richer and more comfortable, men if they lived in the colonies ; nearly all are reluctant to go there. What is the potent and secret influence of this land, of London with its fog and squalor and

ugliness, that men will endure poverty, taxation, and all the gamut of human misery, simply in order to be allowed to stay in it? Is it laziness? Stupidity? Prejudice? Is it something, at the last, deeply indefinable and spiritual, to do with pervasive royalty and history and an ingrained patriotic sense? Is it pride of being English that sustains them as, without complaint, they strap-hang? I wish that I knew the answer to these questions.

The Chinese—their poverty and the war apart—in their ignorance have a lot to be thankful for. Much of this they share with the foreigners in China, who grow in time to be like them. Some sort of a case, at least, can be made out for ignorance in a world which knows so much and yet harbours so many ills.



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